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Bunker Reclamation

Demosthenes Sfakianakis

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Bunker Reclamation



Demosthenes Sfakianakis

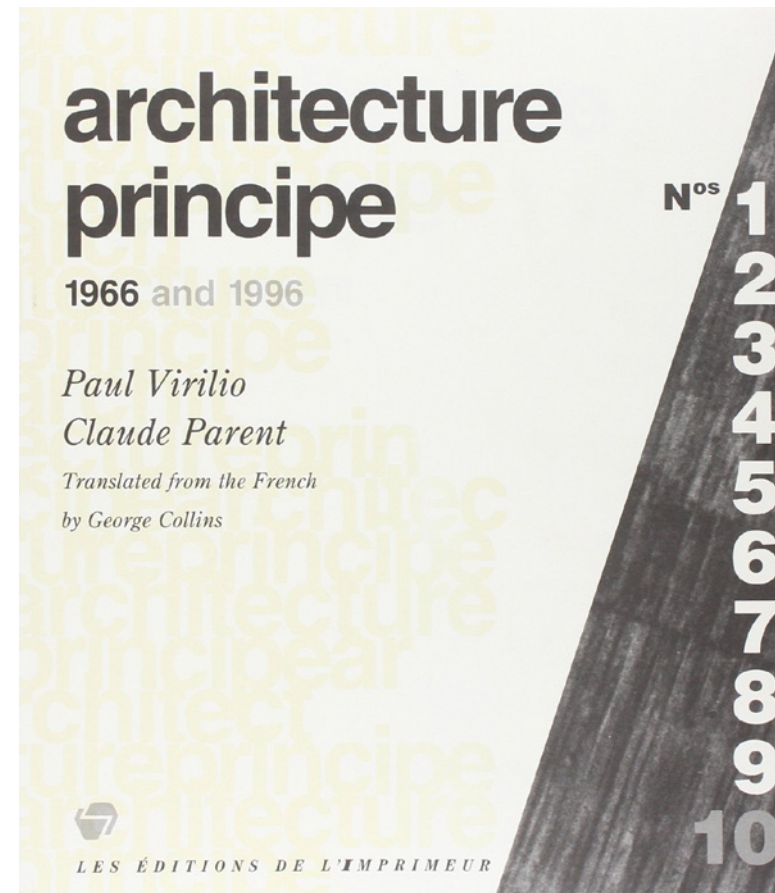
Thesis Document - Spring 2020
Thesis Advisors: Matthew Celmer, Abingo Wu
Research Grant Advisor: Joseph Godlewski

thesis intent

- + an analysis and documentation of the extremes of the communist regime of Albania
- + a political exploration into the dictatorship of the proletariat in which the working class holds power in a post-Hoxha environment
- + a design implementation in which the bunkers are reclaimed from the charged symbolism of oppression and become agents towards a collective catharsis and healing

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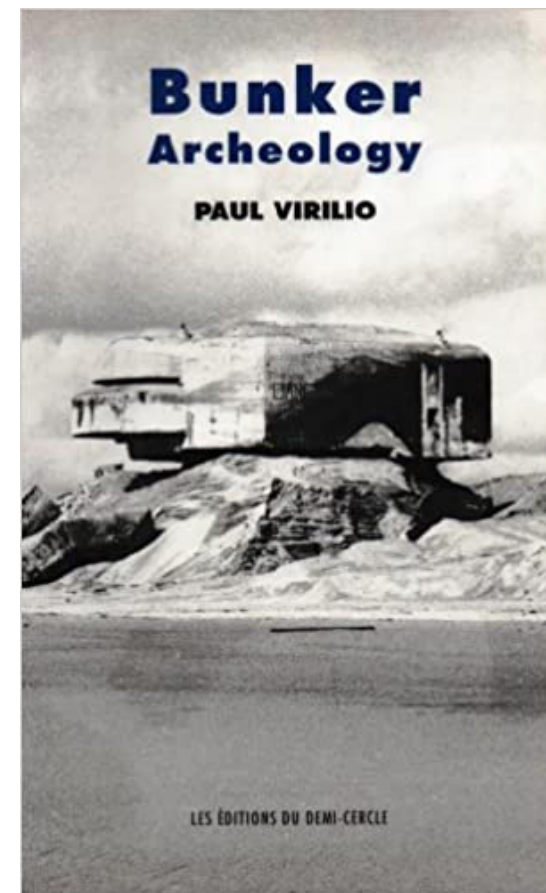
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Architecture Principe

Paul Virilio & Claude Parent
1966

A primary influence of this thesis are the works of Paul Virilio and Claude Parent. The architecture and theory duo documented and interpreted the bunkers of Hitler's Atlantic Wall along the coast of Europe and Scandinavia



Bunker Archeology

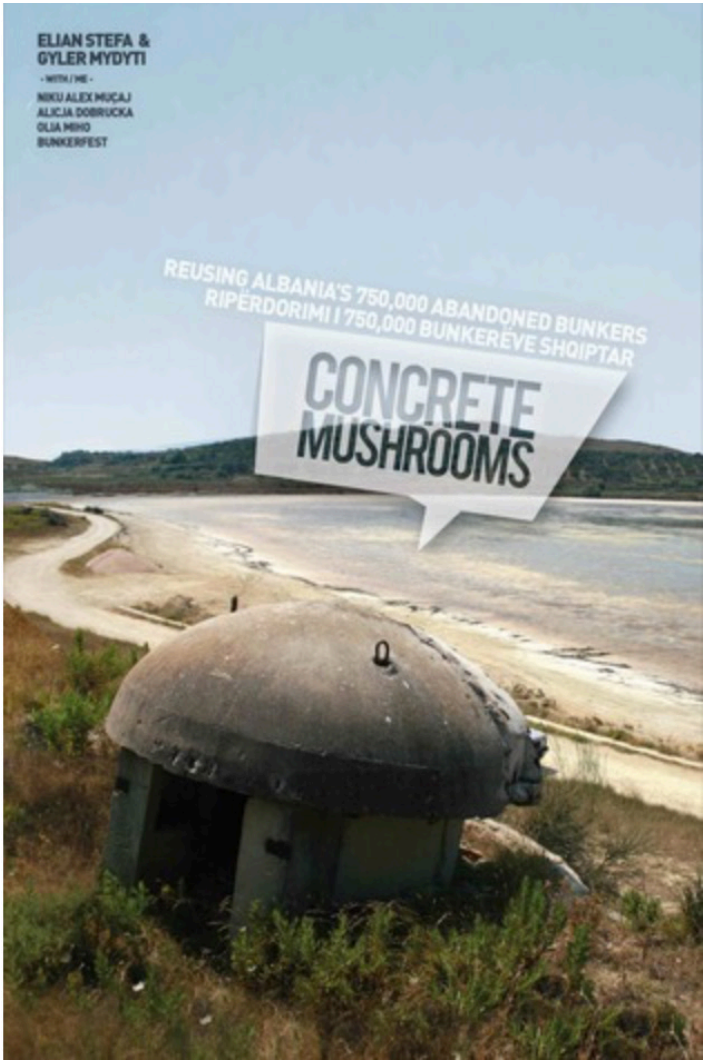
Paul Virilio
1975



St. Bernadette du Banlay

Paul Virilio & Claude Parent
Nevers, France, 1966

In equal parts an implementation of theory of movement as well as the transformation of militaristic form into a sacred space.



Concrete Mushrooms

Elia Stefa & Gyler Mydyti
2013

With hardly any discourse outside of Albania, these bunkers represent a unique opportunity to pursue the charged forms within the contemporary context.



DEMOSTHENES

- + Illyrian, Thracian, Greek tribes
- + Greek colonies
- + Roman provinces



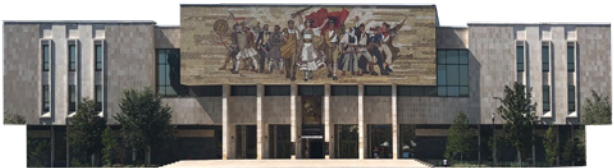
SKANDERBEG

- + Ottoman Occupation



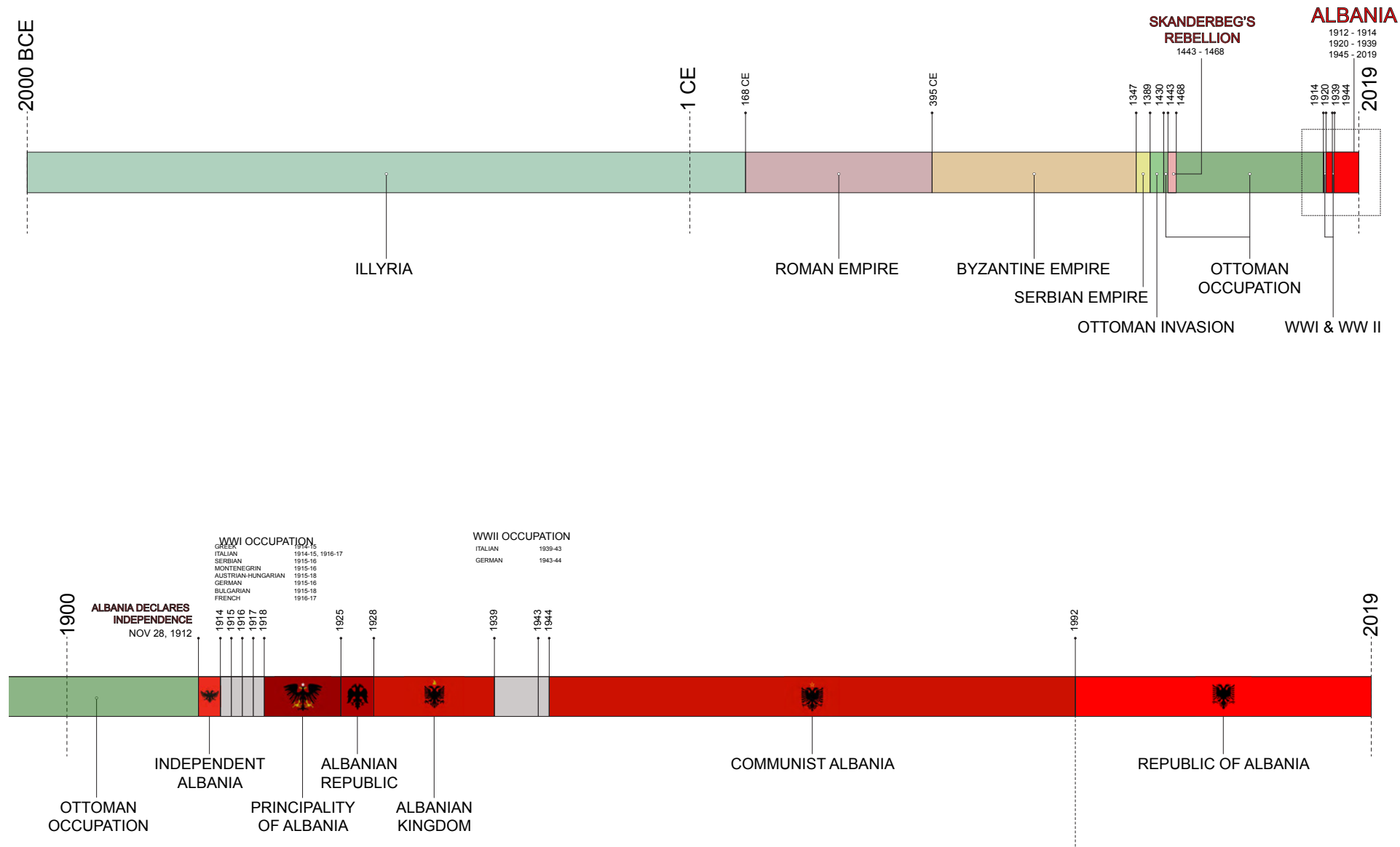
POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY OF TIRANA

- + Italian Occupation

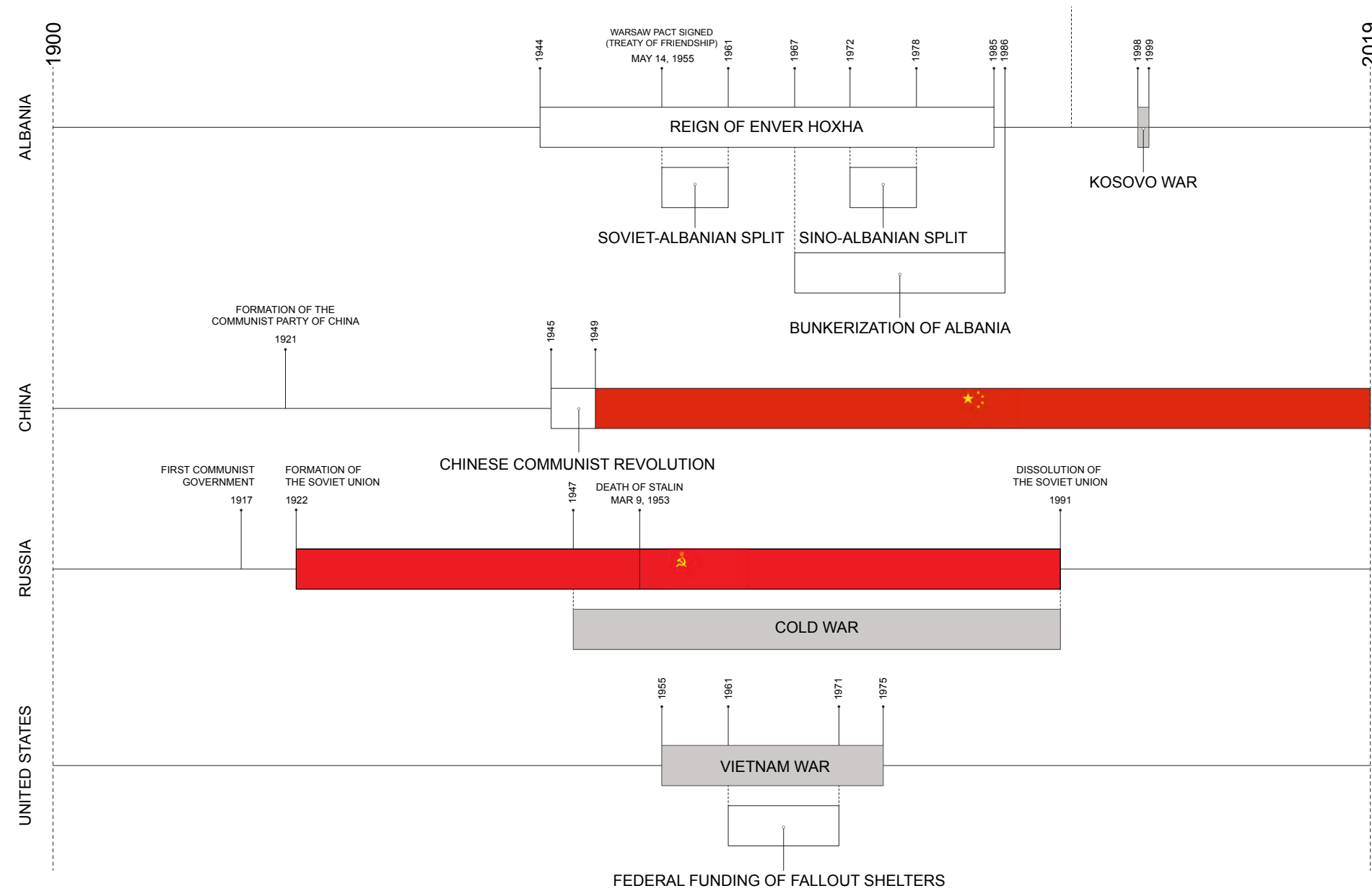


NATIONAL HISTORY MUSEUM

- + Soviet Union Satellite



Albania is a relatively young nation, marred by a history of occupation and foreign rule - the celebrated moments in Albanian history are closely linked to national identity and rebellion.



Independent as of 1912, Albania remained susceptible to foreign influence. Primarily in the appeal of communism amidst the rise of China and the Soviet Union.



Portrait of Enver Hoxha decorates the main entrance of the Palace of Culture.

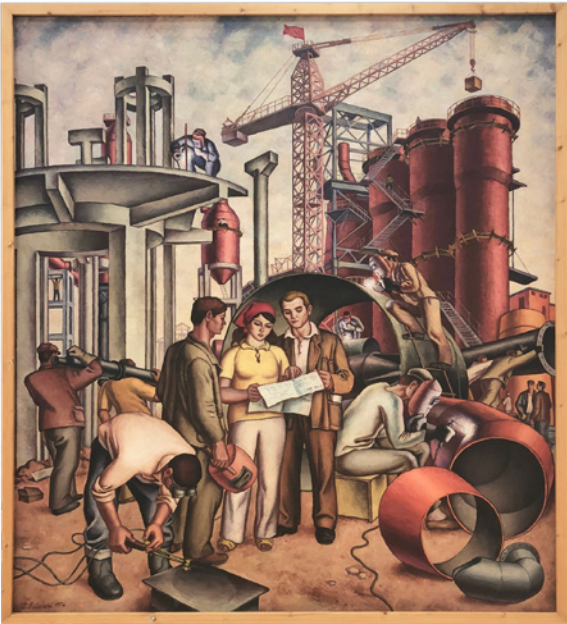
Tirana, 1970s



Enver Hoxha of Albania

Throughout his reign, the infamous leader of Albania, Enver Hoxha, implemented a radical form of communism which scarred the nation indefinitely. The dictator pursued Hoxhaism, which relied on national isolation and manipulation of the people. This power was maintained by a strict visual language that punished nonconformist architectural forms and required specific color palettes and subjects in art. The items on the left were acceptable to the regime, however, the items to the right resulted in the imprisonment of their creators.

ACCEPTABLE



ISUF SULOVARI (1934 - 2006)
THE GIANT OF METALLURGY, 1974



NATIONAL MUSEUM OF HISTORY, 1981
MOSAIC: THE ALBANIANS

UNACCEPTABLE



EDISON GJERGO (1939 - 1989), IMPRISONED IN SPAÇ 1975 - 1982
THE EPIC OF THE MORNING STARS, 1971



MAKS VELO (1935 -), IMPRISONED IN SPAÇ 1979 - 1989
RESIDENTIAL BUILDING, 1975

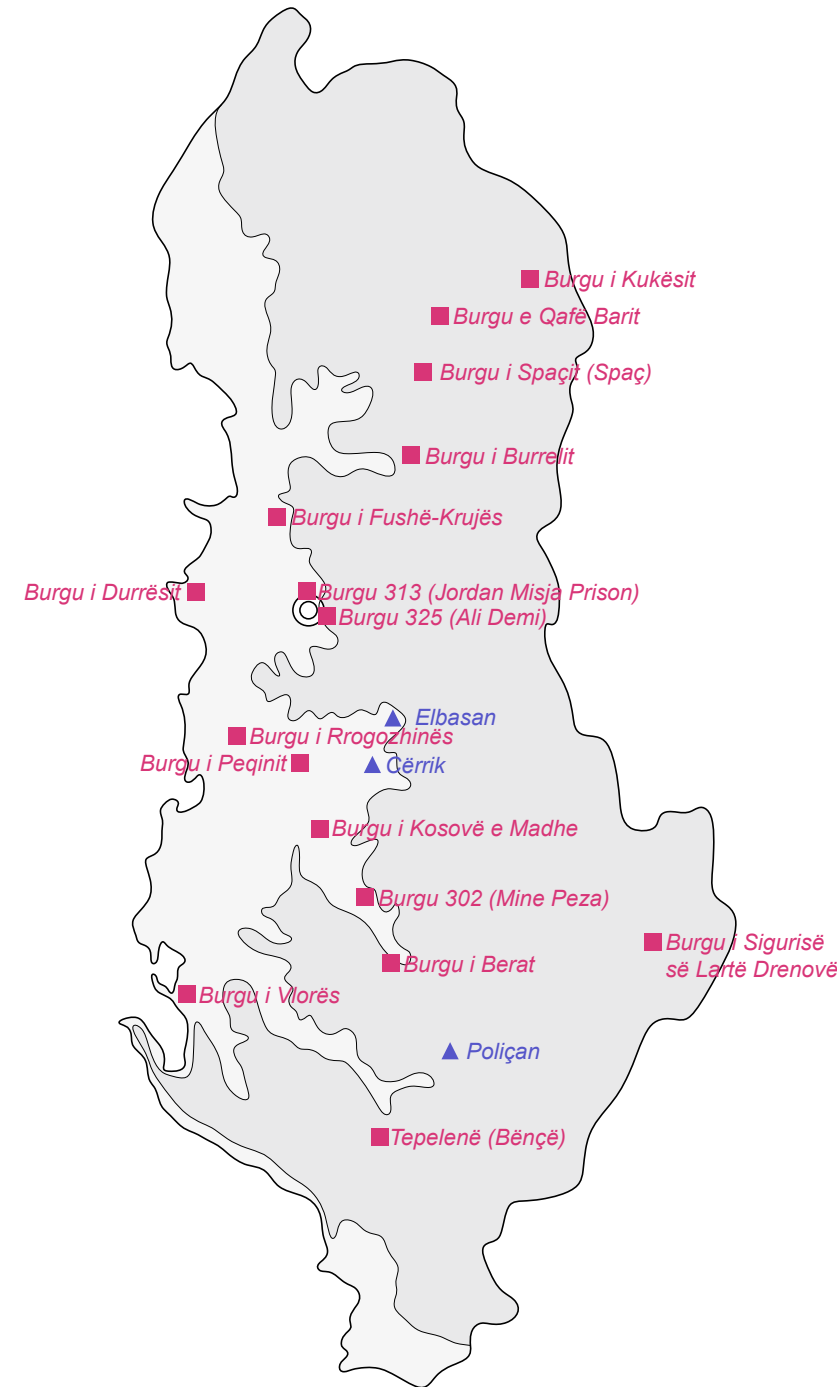
IMPRISONMENT & LABOR

In order for Albania to function under Communist rule, the entirety of the nation was required to shift towards a period of total industrialization and surveillance. While the economy was focused on internal production, the general population was monitored to minimize dissidence and assure devout following. These two measures were realized through the commitment to silence any hint of dissidence while at the same time provide Albania with a framework of industrial growth.

It was during this period that political imprisonment and persecution became common place. Inspired by Stalin's stringent methods of political suppression, Hoxha sought to quiet any form of rejection to his communist beliefs. Through the services of the Sigurimi, the Directorate of State Security, Hoxha began to imprison religious figures, artists, architects, writers, and citizens across the nation. These prisons ranged in size and function, some served as internment camps, while others functioned as forced labor camps that survivors have equated to the concentration camps of Nazi Germany. Amidst this communist oppression, those not seized by the military, were often required to relocate to satisfy the demand of workers in the rapidly industrializing factory cities.

The actions of Hoxha's dictatorship defined communist Albania, and ultimately crippled the nation after the dissolution of communism in Albania and throughout the world. The death of Hoxha and subsequent removal of the leading communist party exposed this period for its realized effects.

■ PRISON / LABOR CAMPS ▲ FACTORY



■ *Burgu i Spaçit (Spaç)*

Of the prisons used during the communist Albania, Spaç remains one of the most infamous. Located, in the northern half of Albania, Spaç functioned primarily as a political prison, those which were assumed to have manifested any idea against the idea of the communist reign of Enver Hoxha were often sent to Spaç. However, the infamy of the prison does not arise from its list of influential captives, but rather the forced labor which was required of them.

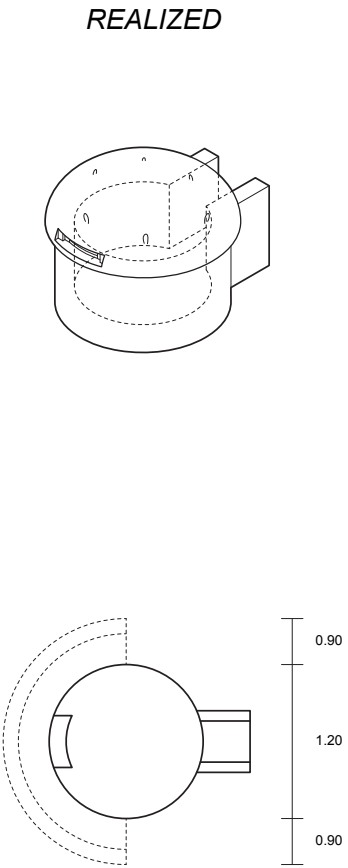
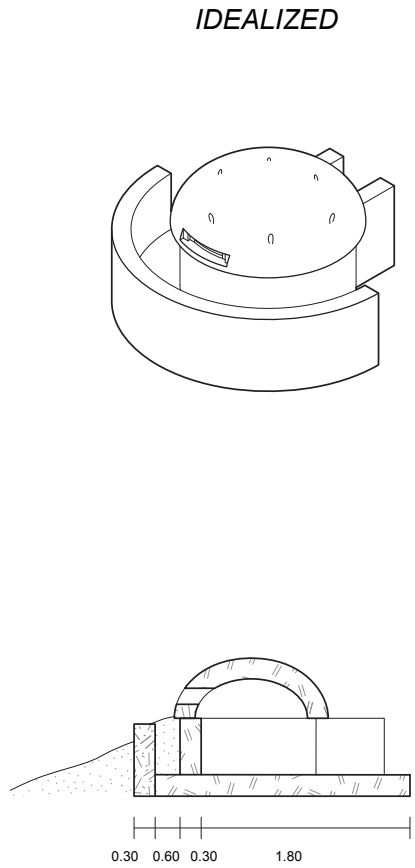
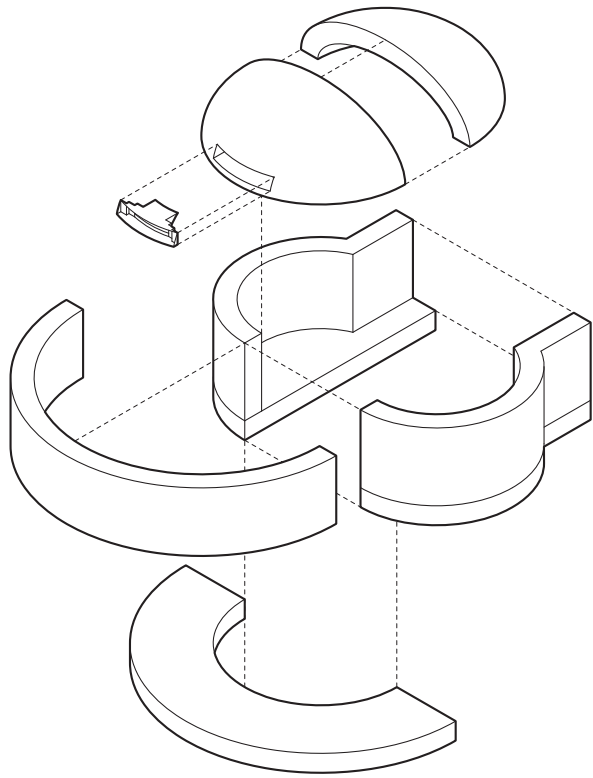
Not only were the citizens of Albani seized and placed into Spaç, but those held in this prison were required to commit to forced labor. Adjacent to a mine, captives were demanded to mine for hours each day for the entirety of their sentence.



▲ *Elbasan*

The industrial development which occurred in Elbasan is emblematic of the massive economic shift which Hoxha associated with Albania's greatness. Located 50 km from the capital, Tirana, Elbasan served as the nexus of industry during the communist period in Albania. The industrial city was composed of: a metallurgy plant, ferrochrome plant, and large scale factories of cement, bricks, and wood. Elbasan quickly became the center of industrial development.

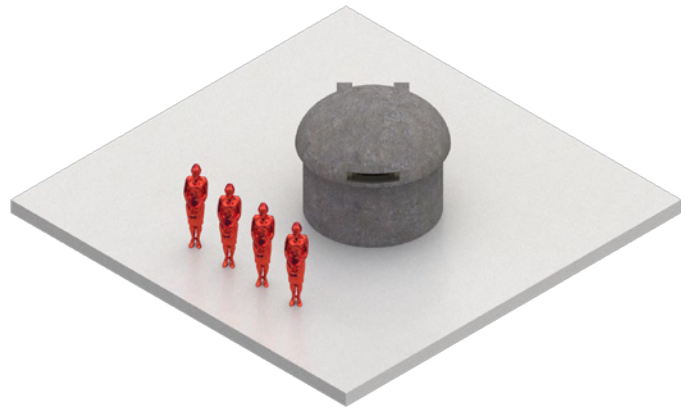
Influenced by other factors such as the KESH "Korporata Elektro-energjetike Shqiptare" (the Albanian Electric Enterprise), which provided the electricity for the industry of Elbasan to function, the growth of this area became a national effort. This is also seen through the use of hydro-energy transmission and the nearby power plant of Banjë to succeed Hoxha's mission.



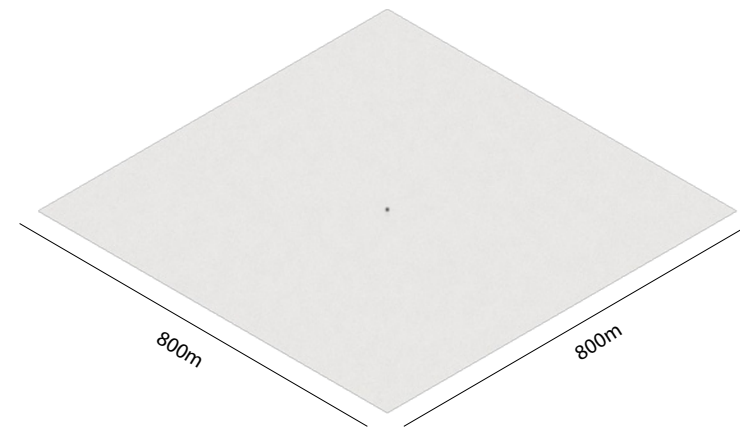
Qender Zjarri - “Firing Position”

A main product of the manufacture of the regime was the bunker. From 1967 to 1986, Hoxha sought to defend his nation from invasion by constructing and distributing an estimated 180,000 to 750,000 bunkers. The bunker diagram shown is the Qender Zjarri or “firing position” and represents the smallest and most common of the three types of bunkers created.

1 bunker for every 4 Albanians



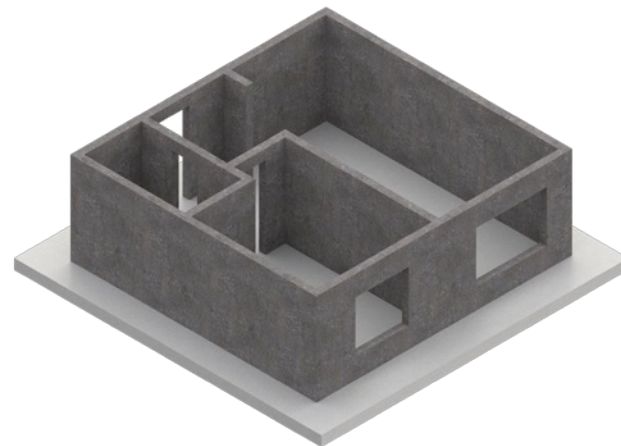
1 bunker for each 800 sq.m



1 bunker = 180m asphalt road



1 bunker = one bedroom apartment



The material consumption is staggering and to many Albanians the effort should have gone toward nationwide infrastructural development.

“ A people which are a big part of our population are emotionally charged about this architecture or infrastructure. Our generation is not so emotionally connected; we see in a different perspective but there is a generation that looks at the bunker as a very bad memory of the past of what they could have done better. ”

Joana Dhiamandi, POLIS University

- highland
 - lowland
 - urban
- [S], “qender zjarri”
 - [M], “pike zjarri”
 - [L], “struktura speciale”

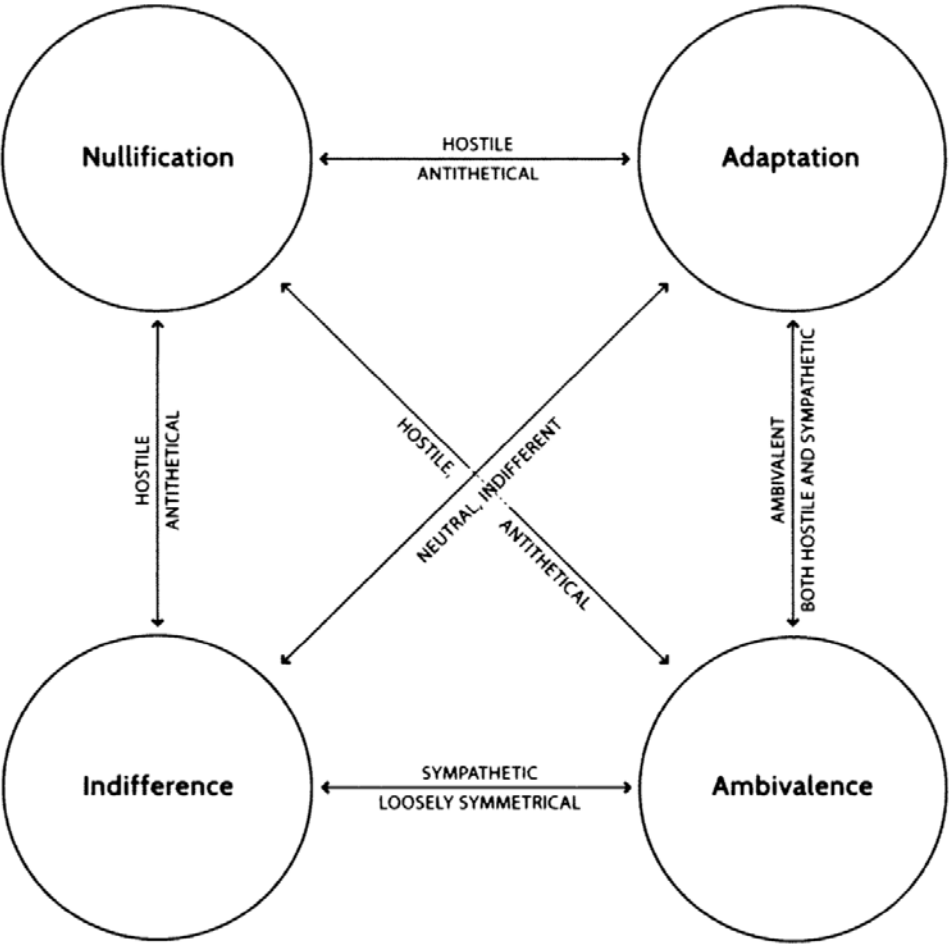
- as ruins in the landscape
- as lived spaces put to local use
- as spaces converted to new uses proper to the consumption of the bunker fantasy
- as spaces converted to reflection on the bunker fantasy and on bunkerization as such.

Concrete Mushrooms

Elian Stefa & Gyler Mydyti

The Bunkerization of Albania

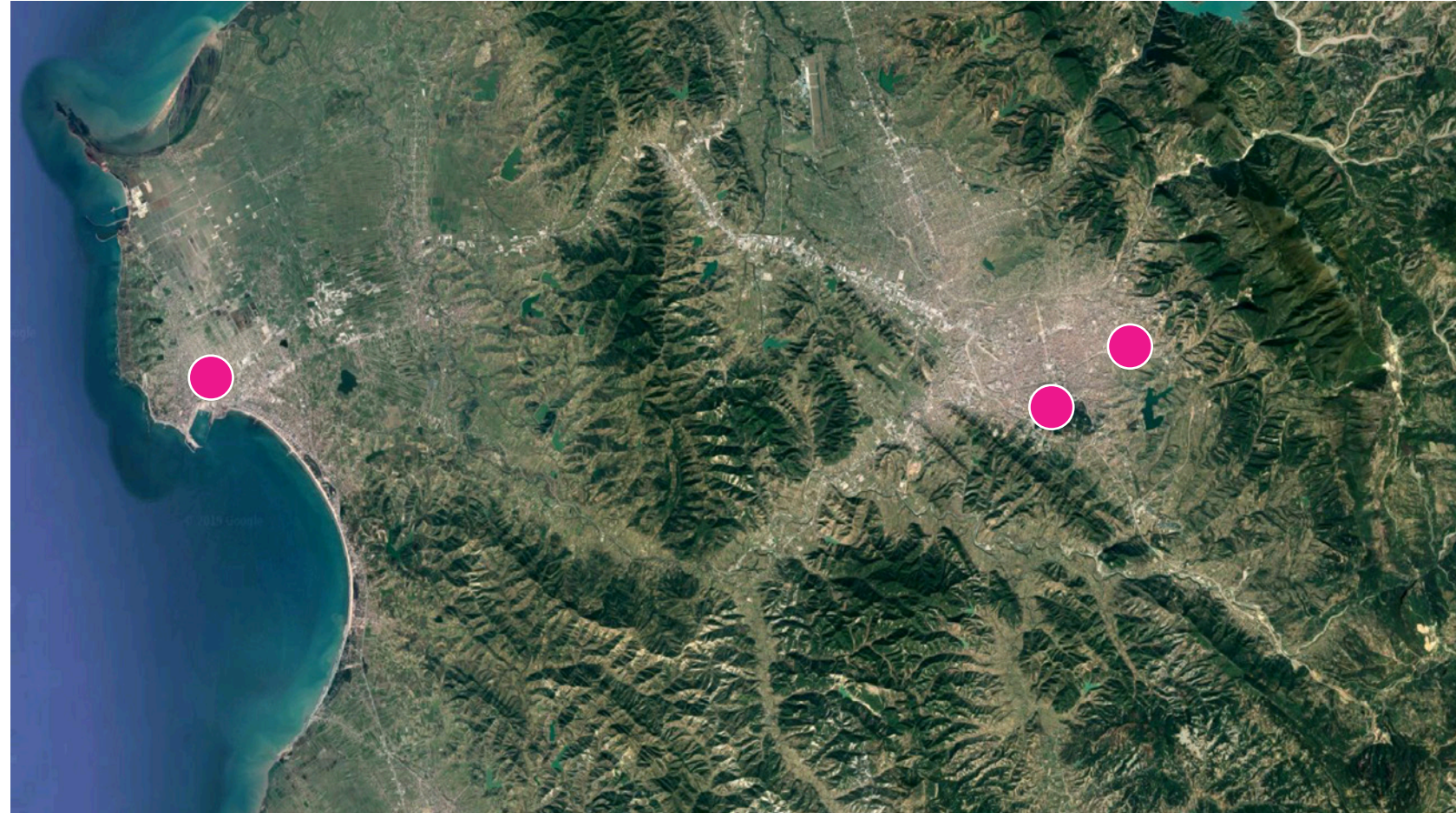
David Price



Projekti Bunkerizimit: The Strange Case of The Albanian Bunker

Jason Payne

Urban Condition



Durrës, Albania

Tirana, Albania





Highland Condition



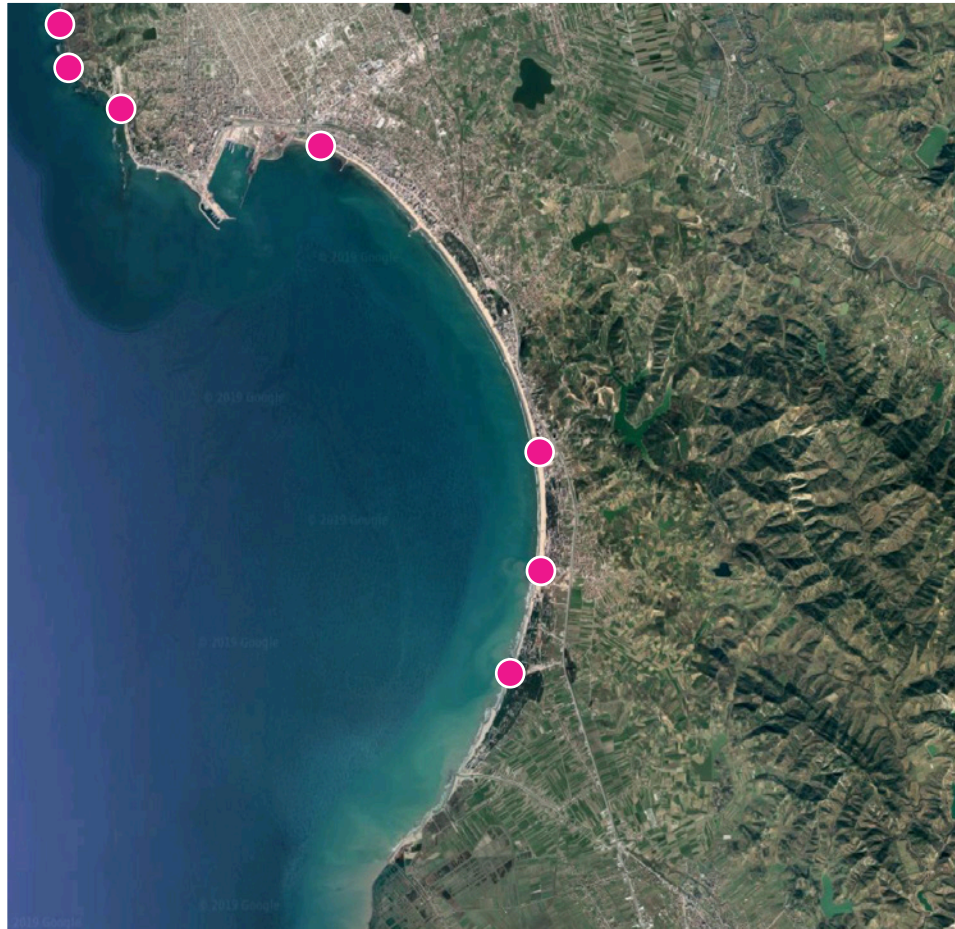
Durrës Hill

Mount Dajti





Coastal Condition



Durrës, Albania





The experience of the bunkers first hand allows for a new means of classification:

“ I see them as a potential to be positive. ”

RUINATION

TRANSFIGURATION

INTROSPECTION

DECONSTRUCTION

Joana Dhiamandi, POLIS University

While many of the bunkers lie in ruin – slowly worn away by nature, some are altered by locals for structural, programmatic, or visual transformation

The bunkers also become agents to a collective memory in the recognition of their past or the erasure of their symbolism.

RUINATION



TRANSFIGURATION



STRUCTURAL

PROGRAMMATIC

COSMETIC

ORNAMENTAL

INTROSPECTION



CREATION

MEMORIALIZATION

ADOPTION

EXAGGERATION

*Rumble Studio,
Jason Payne (UCLA)*

DECONSTRUCTION



REUSE

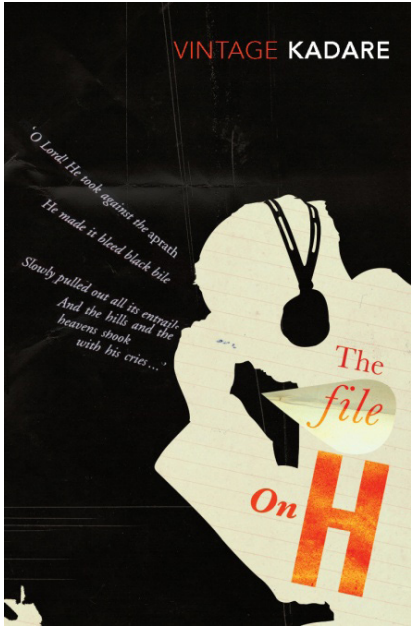
REMOVAL

PROTEST

*Albanian Protestors
vent anger at PM's office,
torch bunker
Arben Celi*

SCAVENGE

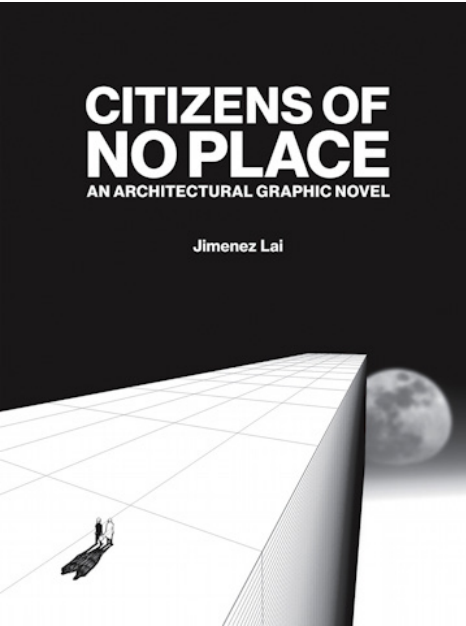
*Concrete Mushrooms
Documentary,
Elian Stefa &
Gyler Mydyti*



The File on H

Ismail Kadare
1981

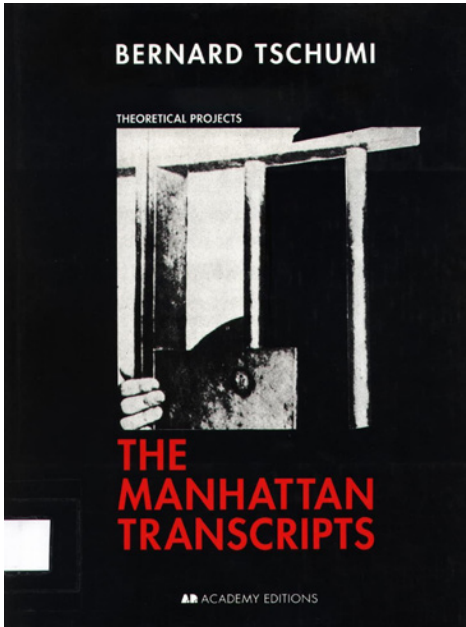
Expresses the censorship of information in communist Albania and its fragmented history.



Citizens of No Place

Jimenez Lai
2012

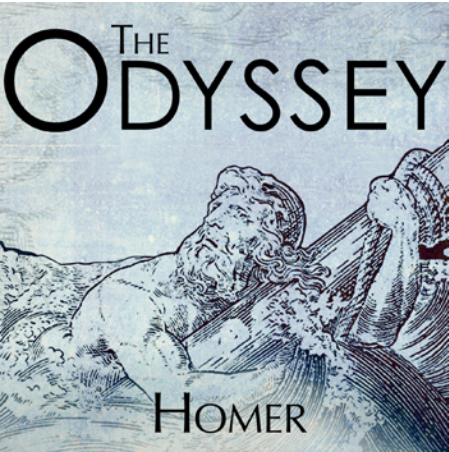
Utilizes graphics to create exaggerated future realities that reflect pressing social and economic topics.



The Manhattan Transcripts

Bernard Tschumi
1981

Tell story using drawings of sequence and space through movement.



The Odyssey

Homer
8th century BC

Is indicative of the power of narrative to be based in cultural identity without a single word being written.

I Burgosur (The Prisoner)

A Post-Hoxha Epic

The medium of graphic narrative allows for:

- The synthesis of historical moments and conditions
- The creation of imagery and perspectives that were not documented or captured
- The embellishment of critical events
- And the connection of the contemporary environment to perspectives of the past and a projective future

The epic of I Burgosur is composed of 4 chapters which employ different narrators to explore unique perspectives in moments of history and fictional future

The Epic is in equal parts:

- an analysis and documentation of the extremes of the communist regime in Albania
- political exploration into the dictatorship of the proletariat in which the working class holds power in a post-Hoxha environment
- a design implementation in which the bunkers are reinterpreted from the charged symbolism of oppression and become agents towards a collective catharsis and healing

I Burgosur (The Prisoner)

A Post-Hoxha Epic

Act 1: Hoxha's Regime

Semblance of a Nation

November 28, 1912, Albania declares independence from Ottoman rule. Suffering under centuries of occupation by the Roman, Byzantine, Serbian, and Ottoman Empires, Albania establishes sovereignty after an extensive history of foreign rule. Led by Ismail Qemali, the primary author of the declaration of independence, the citizens of Vlorë witness the identity of their nation as proclaimed by the father of modern Albania.



Encroachment of Communism

A newly independent nation, Albania found itself highly impressionable amidst the post-war periods preceding the first and second world war. Without an oppressor to dictate internal political and social standards, the nation is quickly influenced by the communist theories led by Mao Zedong of the People's Republic of China and Joseph Stalin of the Soviet Union.



A Dictator Rises

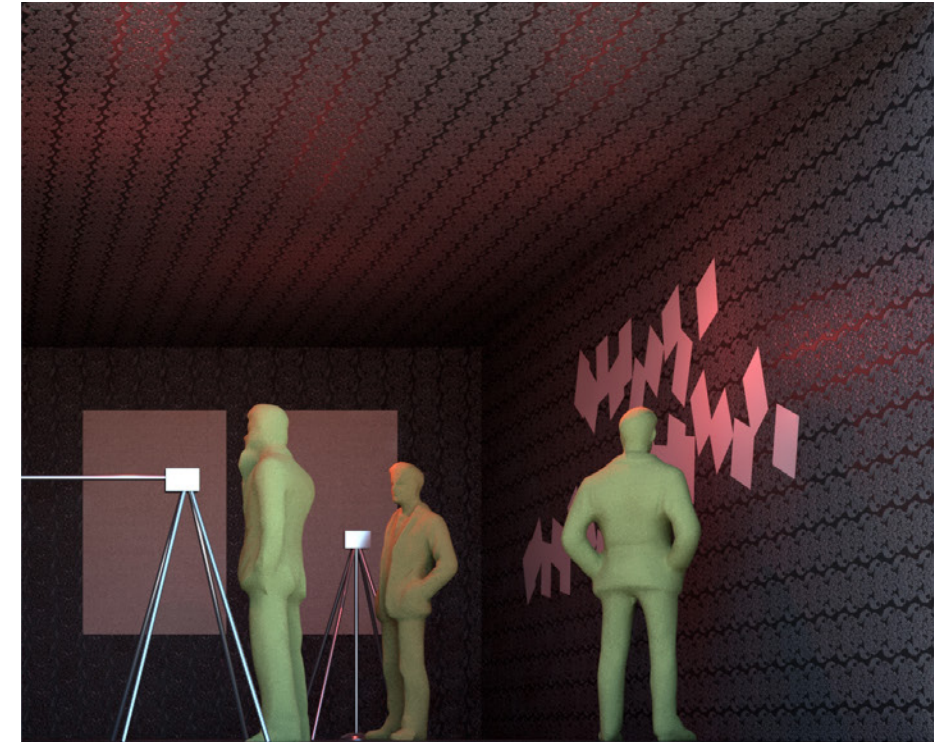
A prominent member of the labor party, Enver Hoxha rises through the political scene with the intent to implement the communist measures of Mao and Stalin. Hoxha then operates as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Prime Minister of Albania, and First Secretary of the Party of Labor of Albania.



Consumed by Paranoia

Plagued by the constant fear of invasion, Hoxha is consumed by his paranoia to the point of national isolation. Fearing influence from or interaction with foreign nations, the paranoid dictator severs Albania from its few allies. This isolation reaches an extreme state in which Hoxha perceives any foreign influence to be a threat to the integrity of his country. A residual fear from centuries of occupation and oppression.





The Sigurimi

To maintain his radical version of communism known as Hoxhaism, the dictator establishes a relentless internal surveillance operation. Aside from stringent border control which restricts citizens from fleeing the land, Hoxha implements the Sigurimi, the Directorate of State Security. Under the guise of safety, the Sigurimi is led to spy on 'suspicious' citizens. An especially invasive strategy often exhibited by the Sigurimi operatives is to carve the walls of adjacent apartments and listen to neighboring conversations for any hint of political rebelliousness.

The Engineer - Josif Zegali

Having studied military engineering in Russia, Zegali is assigned to Hoxha's bunkerization effort where he creates the qender zjarri, the small bunker which soon covers the land of Albania. Despite designing the bunkers himself and being forced to self-test their safety under fire, Zegali is sentenced to the infamous Spaç prison in 1974 for expressing his lack of support in the dictator's plans.



The Artist - Edison Gjergo

Choosing to reject the palette and subject matter as defined by the regime, Gjergo continues to paint his reflections of the unwinding trauma of communism. Viewed as rebellious and his art in direct defiance to the dictatorship, Gjergo is sentenced to Spaç prison in 1975 as his work is 'too blue'.



Act 2: I Burgosur (The Prisoner)

I Burgosur - The Prisoner

A draftsman working under the architect Maks Velo, I Burgosur, The Prisoner, is captured and sentenced to Spaç in 1975 for his involvement in a residential building. The building stands as a 'modernist design', formally against the language of the dictatorship and is perceived as an invasive foreign influence. Taken from his home, I Burgosur is forcibly separated from his wife, Shpresa, presumably never to see each other again.



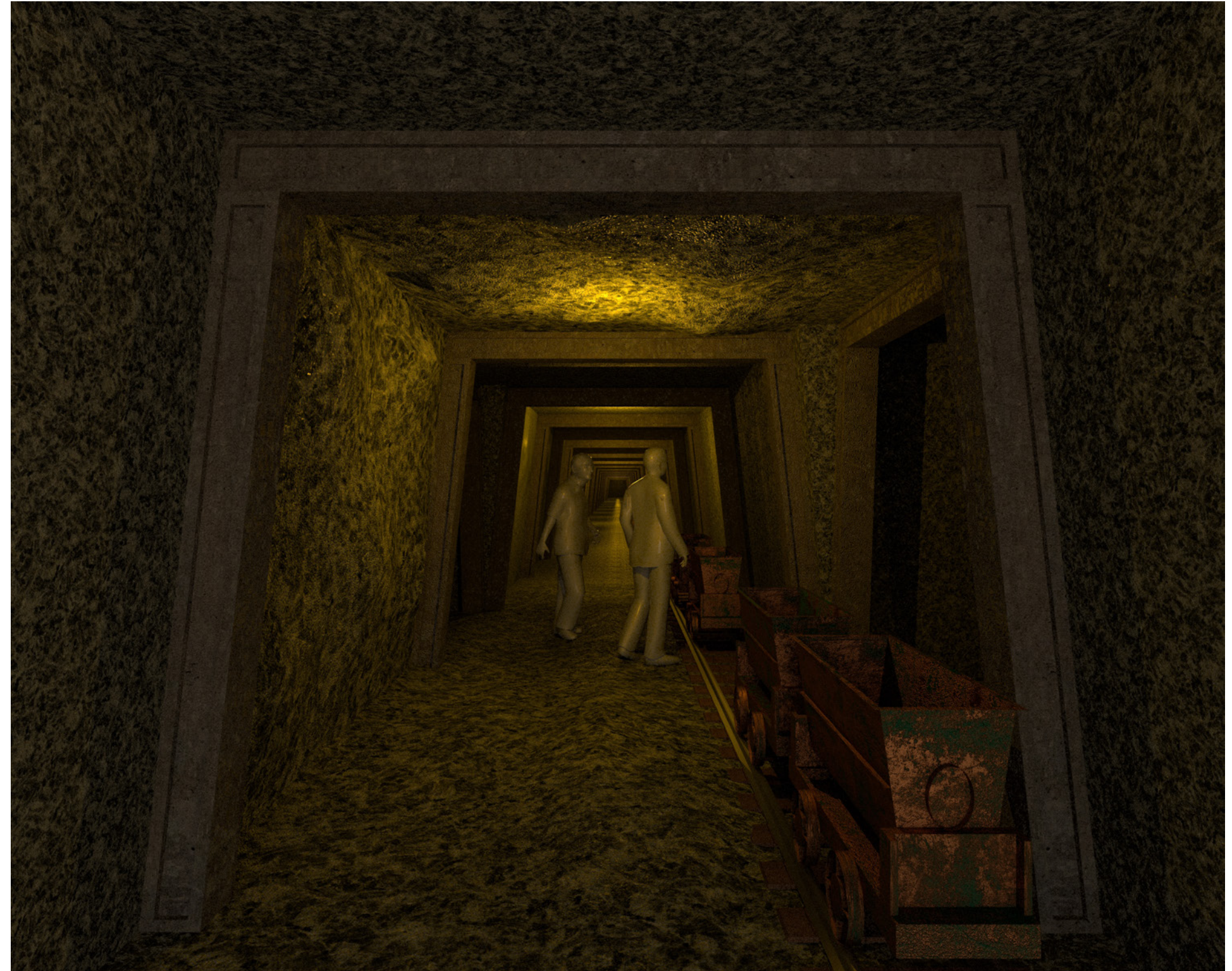
Persecution of the Rebellious

To silence the politically dissident, Hoxha utilizes political prisons throughout Albania. Spaç prison being one of the most infamous, functions as both a prison and a labor camp, requiring the inmates to mine every eight hours for the entirety of their sentences. Prisoners are subject to beatings or torture if quotas are not met.



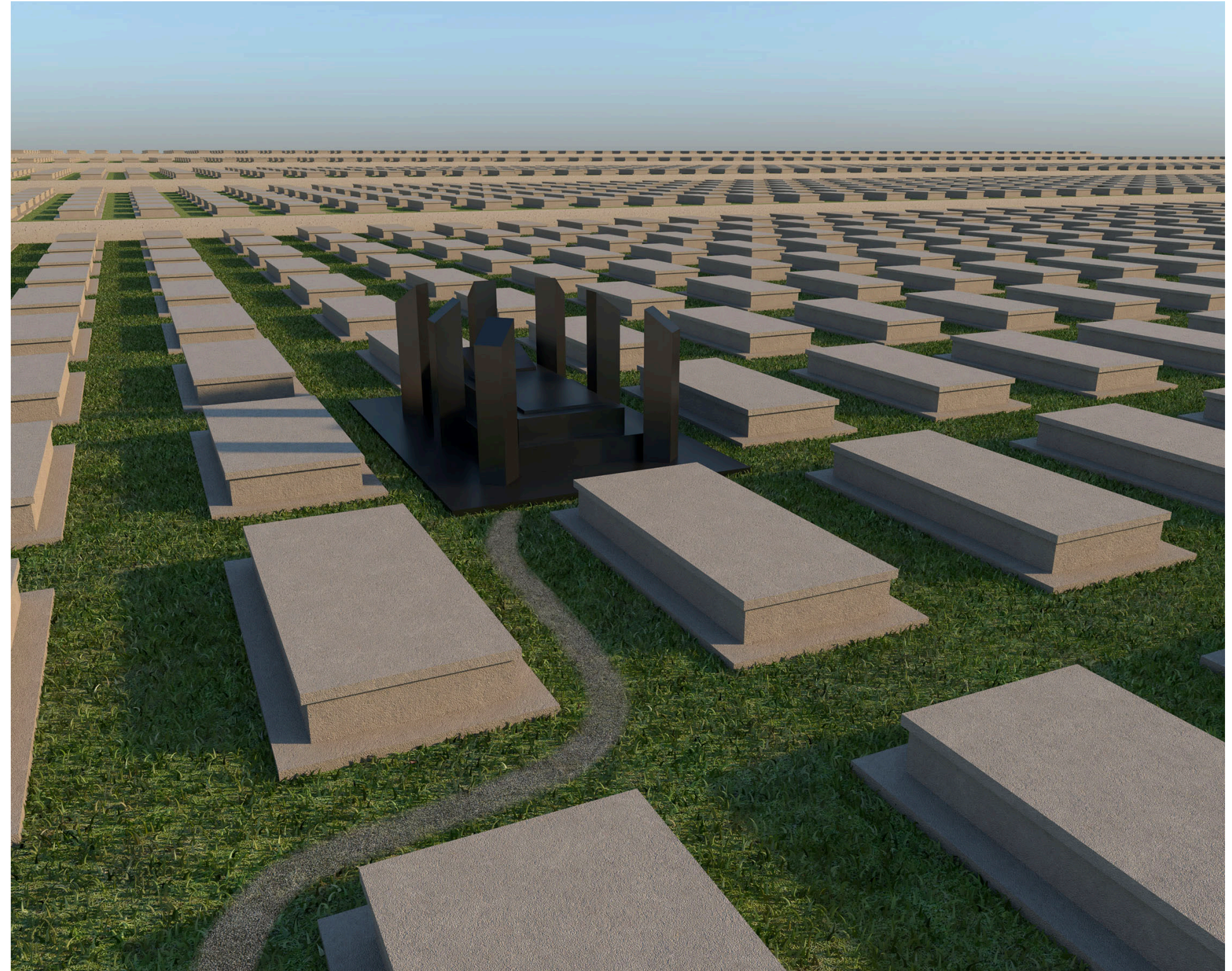
Interaction through Labor

The prisoners travel into the mines where they chisel through the frigid winters of the mountains. It is within these mines that The Engineer (Zegali), The Artist (Gjergo), and The Prisoner (I Burgosur) interact. Through this continual connection, I Burgosur adopts the values of his prison mates' minds.



The Death of Hoxha

April 11, 1985, the death of dictator Enver Hoxha leaves Albania headless. With the regime lacking organization and ability to further oppress and control the citizens of Albania, hoxhaism begins to dissipate. A new means of social coordination is imminent to satisfy the void left by the regime.



Emergence of I Burgosur

I Burgosur, The Prisoner, emerges from Spaç prison having become the confluence of the creativity of the rebellion and the engineering of its devices: the culmination of The Artist, Gjergo, and The Engineer, Zegali.



The Dictatorship of the Proletariat

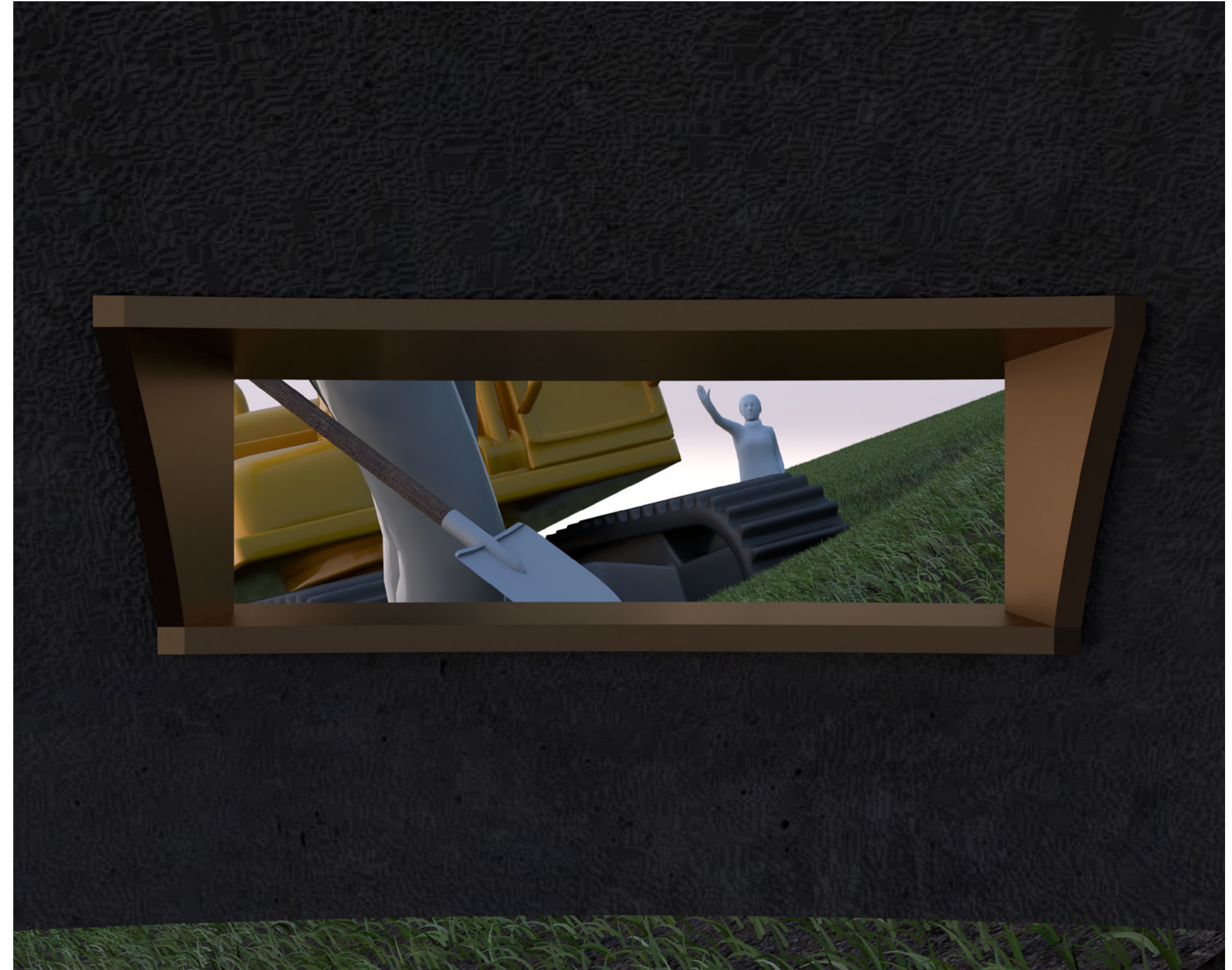
Inspired by the death of Hoxha and the residual reign of communist power, the people of Albania protest for change. This protest is ignited by the proposition of I Burgosur: to treat the existing bunkers, the most recognizable symbols of oppression in Albania, as a post-produced shared good from which the collective people determine their new use. The swift removal of top-down communism is demanded and pursued through a shared means of power, specifically towards the use of the disassembled components of the bunkers.



Act 3: The Bunker



Location



Excavation



Transportation



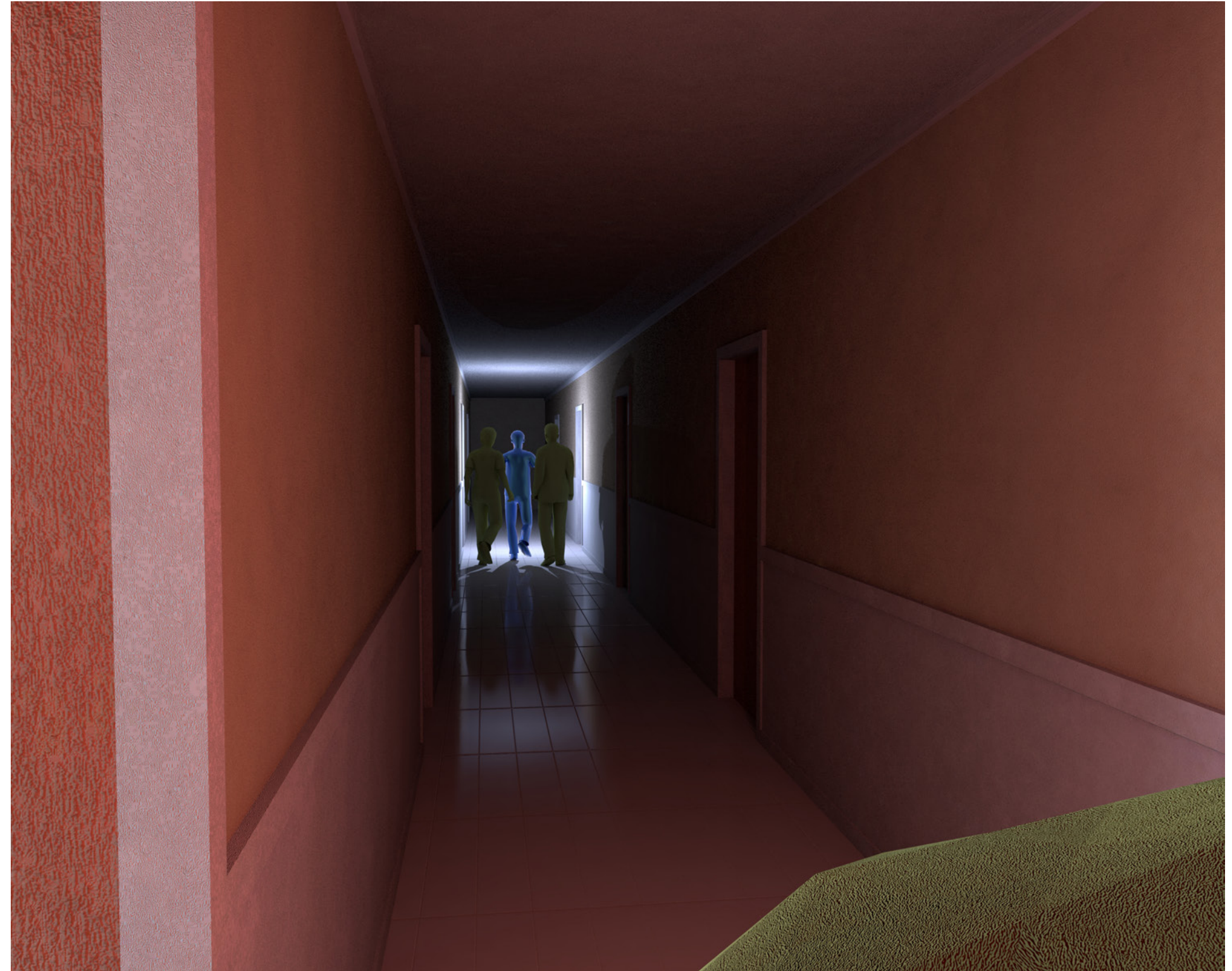
Construction

Act 4: Shpresa (Hope)

Shpresa

Separated from her partner, I Burgosur, during the persecution of Hoxha's regime, Shpresa fled their home after his abduction and spent the following eight years unable to contact the prison for fear of further harm. However, amidst her role as an architect during the rise of the proletariat, she has seen the influence of such a prisoner from the same labor camp that her partner was confined to.

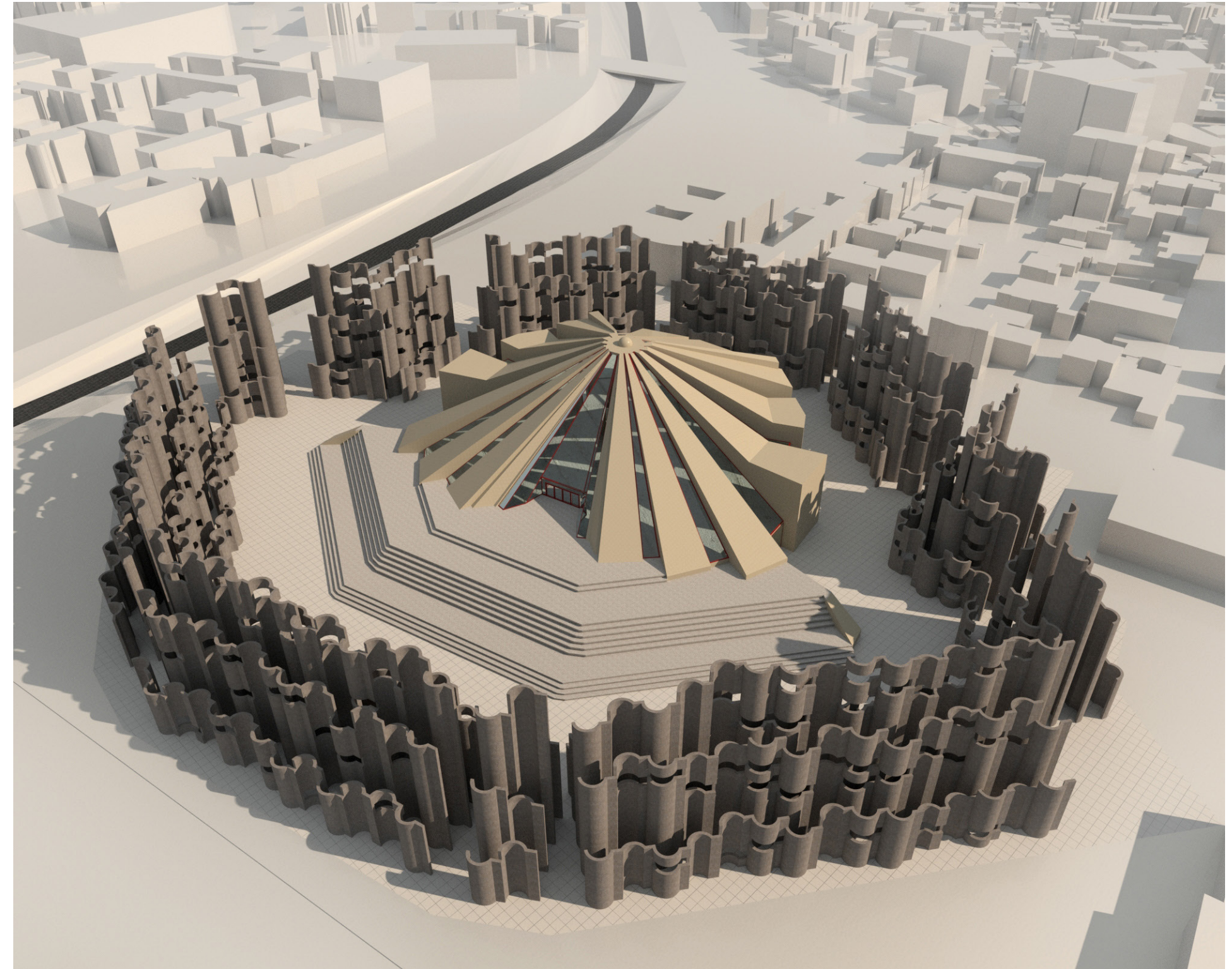
Shpresa, a name that translates to "hope", is optimistic that her partner has survived the labor camp of Spaç. Through her odyssey, Shpresa searches for I Burgosur and encounters six designs which were inspired by the movement of "The Prisoner" and realized by the people of Albania. Each step of the journey becoming a reflection of the dictatorship and a moment of healing.



01

A testament to his reign - the
museum, akin to a mausoleum.
From the moment of its
conception it stood as a reminder
of his legacy. Why remember
a fallen dictator?

THE CONCRETE CURTAIN

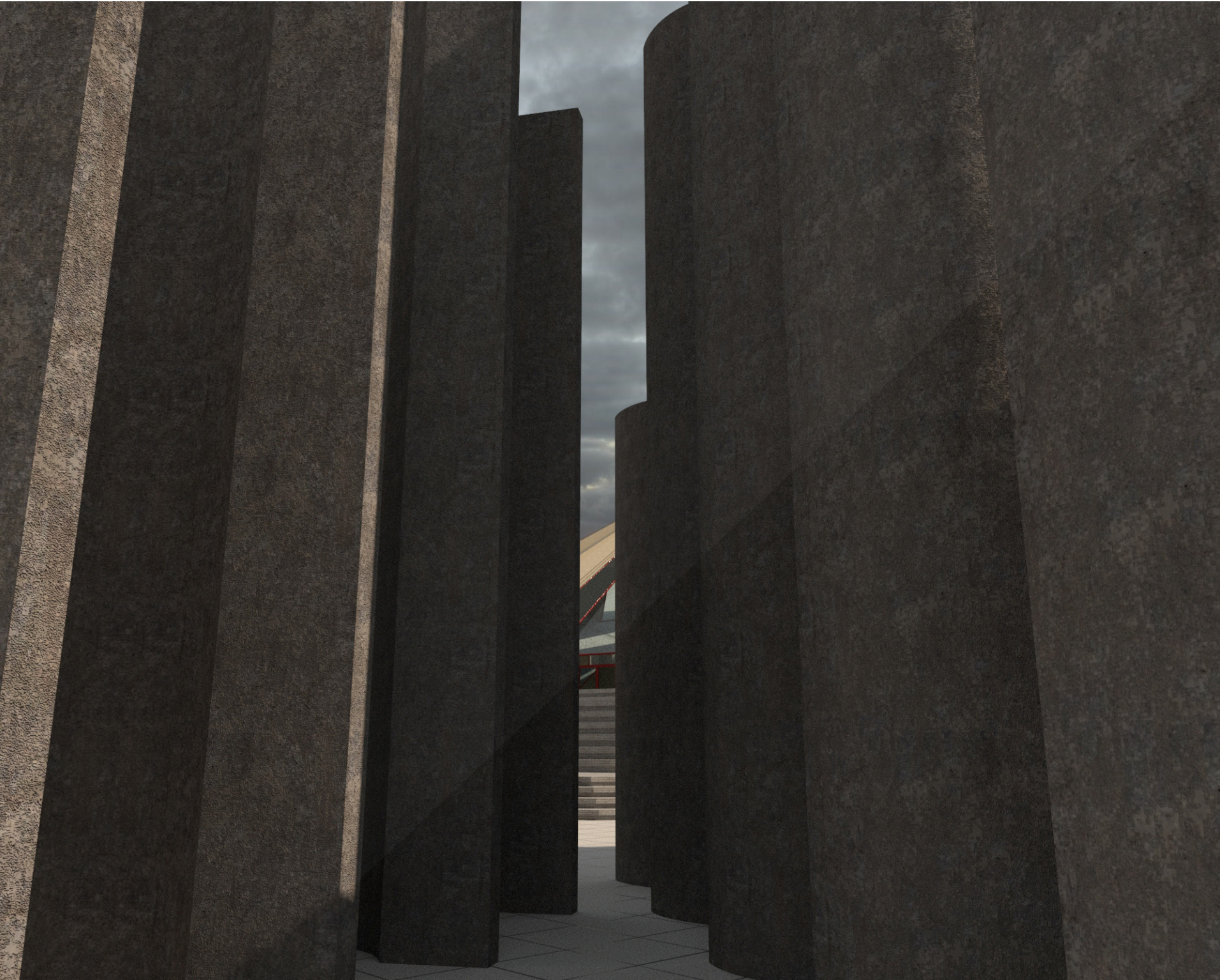


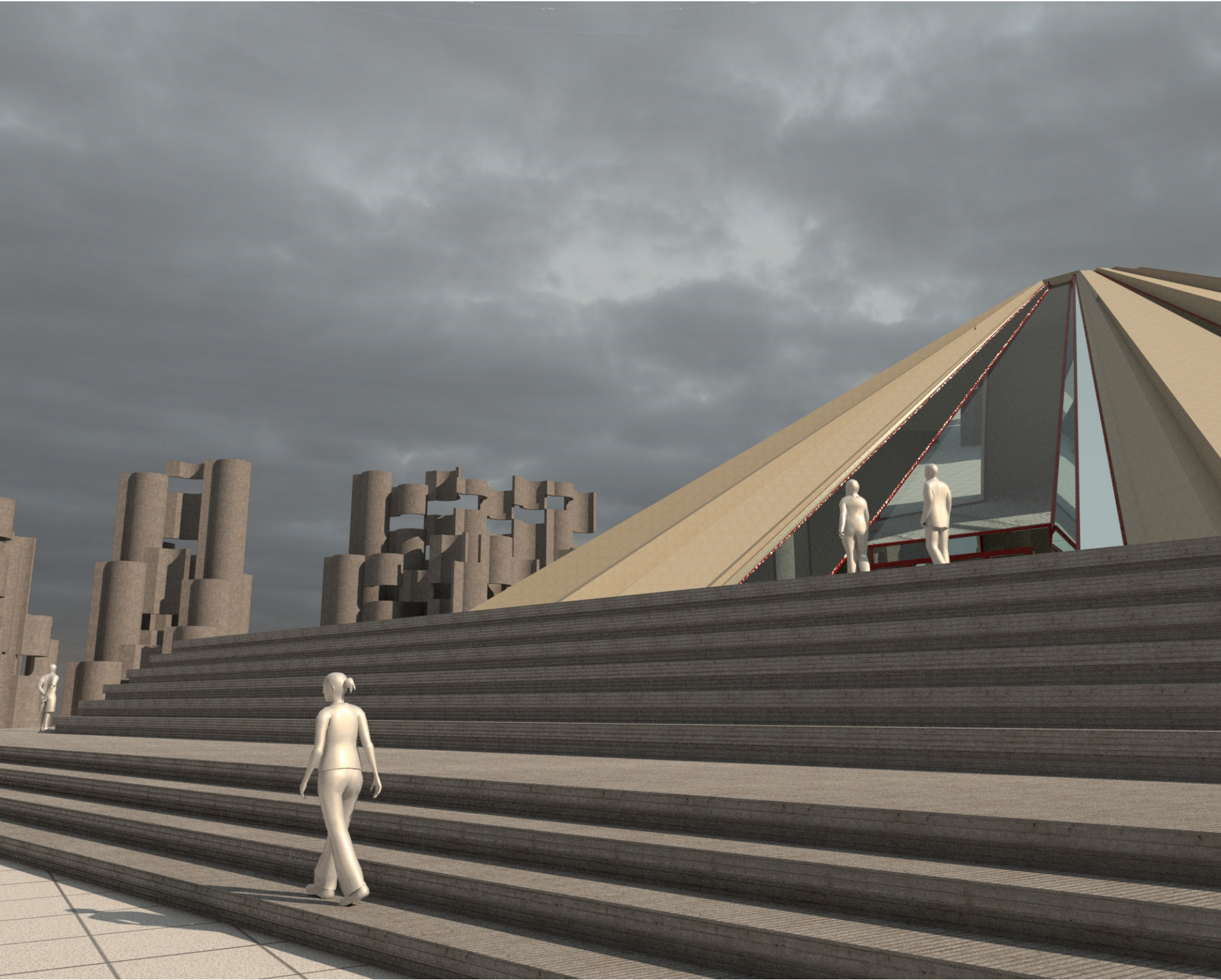
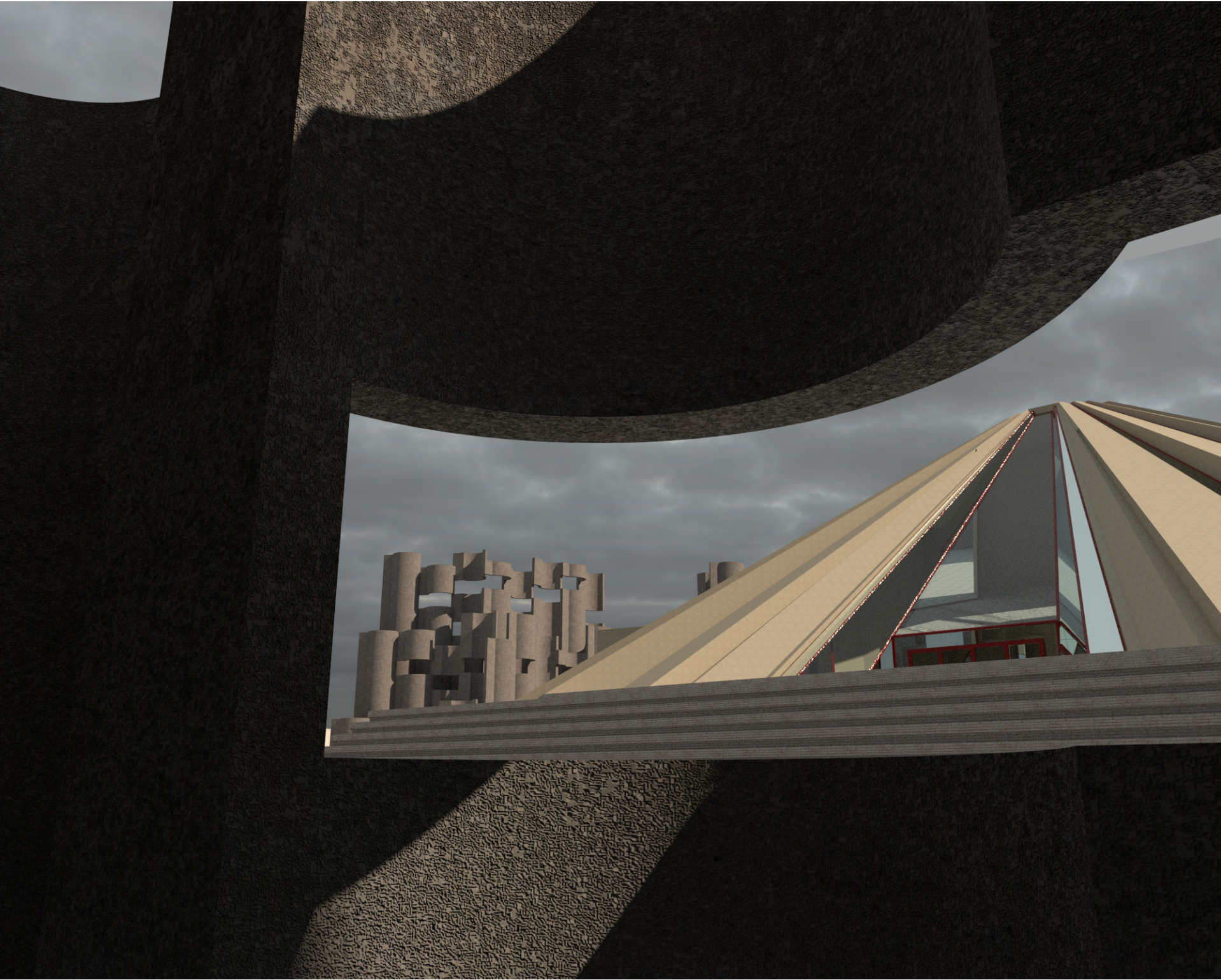
The Concrete Curtain

The Concrete Curtain

The Museum of Hoxha is now contained by the walls of the bunker. Viewed to many as a mausoleum, the pyramid serves as a counter monument - careful not to erase a painful past, but instead to memorialize those afflicted by his reign. It is here that Shpresa's odyssey begins as she searches for I Burgosur, The Prisoner.

While speaking with another victim of the regime, she is told of a prison where she can enquire about the disappeared. As the agents of the dictatorship destroyed prison records, the knowledge of I Burgosur rests with the imprisoned agent himself.

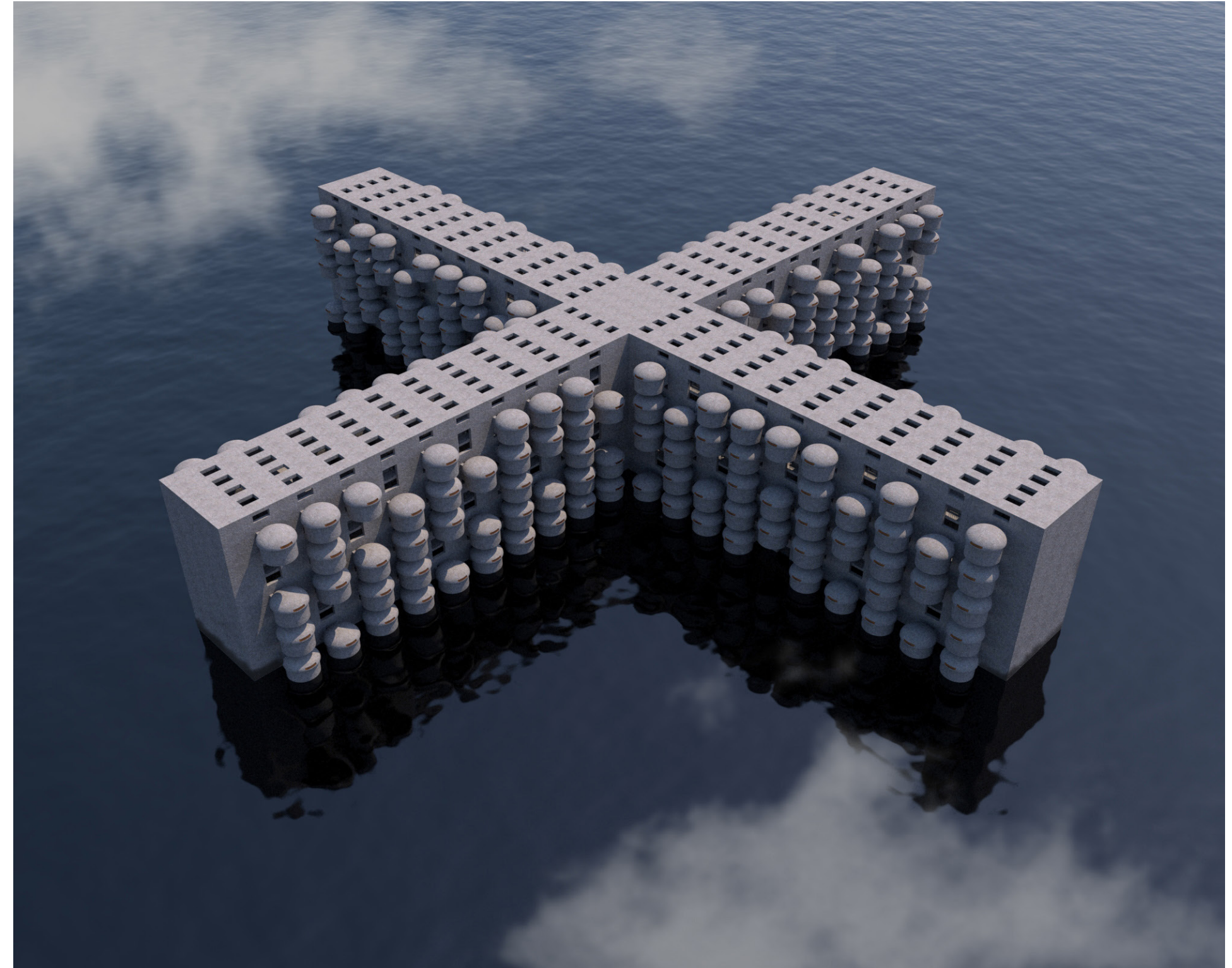




02

Their identities became known -
the same oppressors who
imprisoned the innocent were
detained themselves. When
Hoxha passed and the regime
crumbled... their supremacy faded.

THE PRISON



The Prison

The Prison

The actors of the regime: the spies, corrupt politicians, prison guards and executioners are tried for their crimes against the people of Albania. Now they crouch to enter their bunker cells in a prison off the coastal city of Durrës.



Shpresa speaks to Vako through the bunker cell's rebar. Vako was the chief engineer of the Sigurimi, responsible in reporting I Burgosur's involvement in modernist architecture, the charge of foreign influence which initially separated him from Shpresa nearly a decade ago. Vako suggests Shpresa speak to Liço, the officer of the ward of Spaç where I Burgosur was sentenced.



03

An open field, littered with
reinforced tombstones. To live by
the dictator - to rest with his
devices. The recognition of their
past allegiance. Marked forever...

THE CEMETERY



The Cemetery

The Cemetery

Those who persecuted, maimed, and oppressed the innocent of Albania are now marked indefinitely. Each bunker piece representing a different role in the assistance of the dictatorship as it marks the agents of the regime indefinitely.

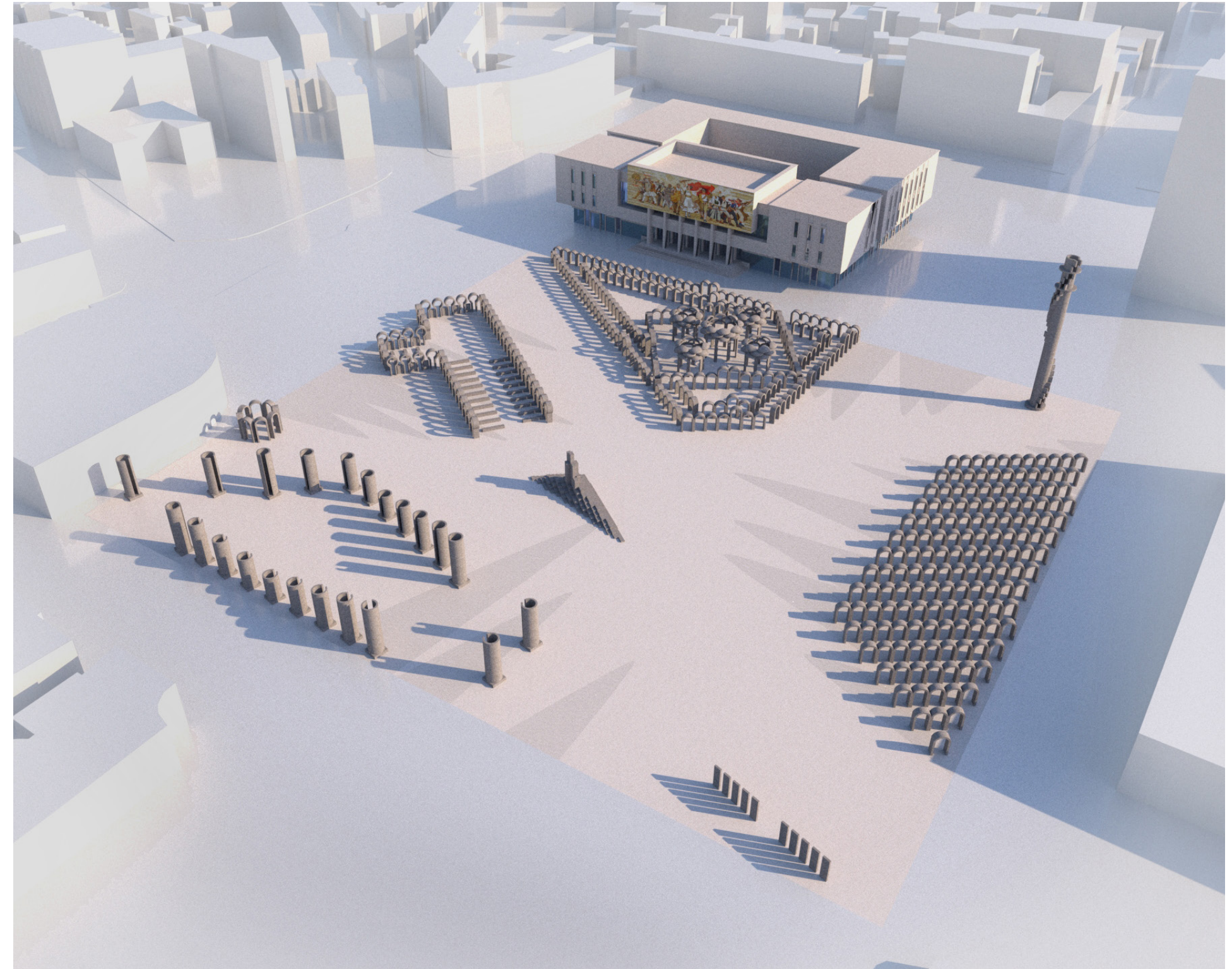
Shpresa traces the name of Liço to the cemetery. Because the records of I Burgosur were destroyed during the demise of the regime, the now deceased ward of Spaç was her final hope in the search for the identity of her partner. Shpresa returns to Tirana, unsuccessful.



04

Restrictions and blanket
illegality - the religious were
barred from their devotion.
Unable to practice their faith,
forced to hide. A renaissance
of religious expression...

THE PANTHEON

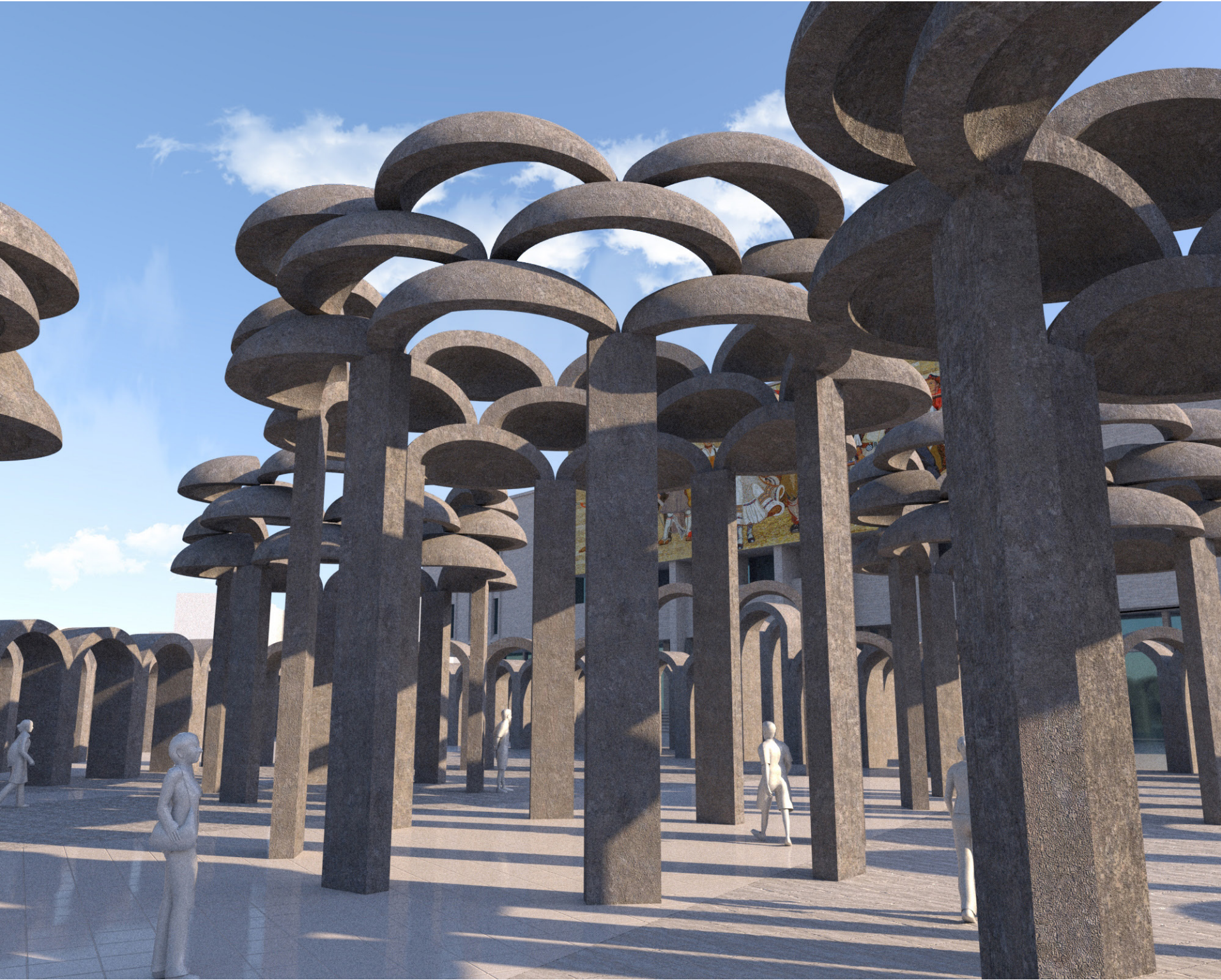


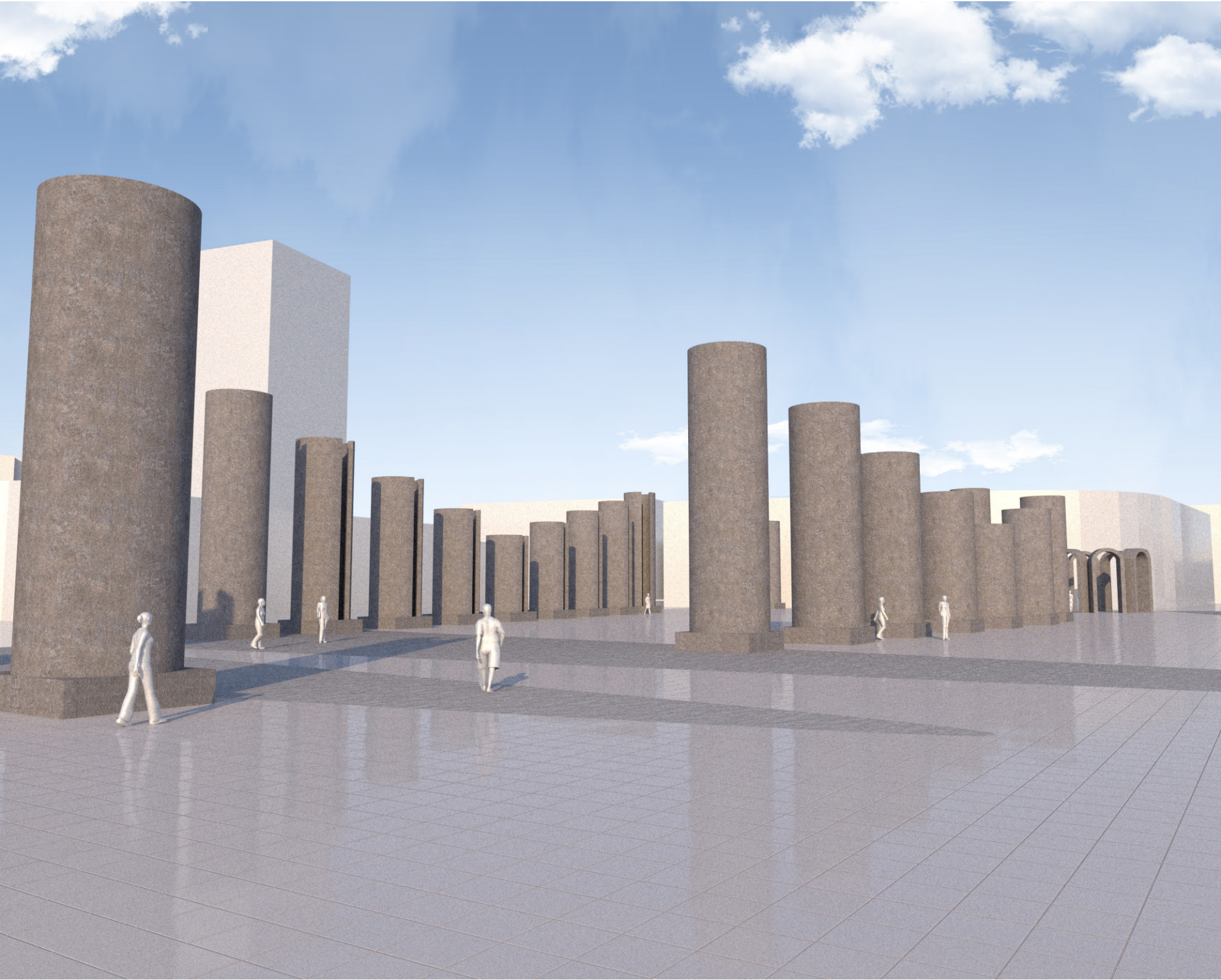
The Pantheon

The Pantheon

Declared an “atheist state” during the dictatorship, Albanians were forbidden from practicing their religions. The regime executed clergymen and imprisoned those found pursuing their faith - so much as crossing yourself would be met with imprisonment. However, religion persevered in secrecy. Those who previously prayed in hiding now celebrate their religion in the pantheon: composed of the majority Islamic, and minority Orthodox and Catholic faiths.







Shpresa passes where the statue of Hoxha once stood as she moves through the pavilions of religious expression. Evoking the memory of when she was forced to hide her prayers for the safety and return of her abducted partner. Now her religion is visible to all.



05

Their childhood stripped away,
forced to witness the regime.
The children, the passive
spectators punished by the
paranoia of a dictator... now
given a chance to play.

THE PLAYGROUND



The Playground

The Playground

Within the former communist bloc, the fallen dictator's yard is now repossessed by children free of the regime. The symbols of oppression become painted objects of irrelevance to the kids climbing over hills and running through tunnels.



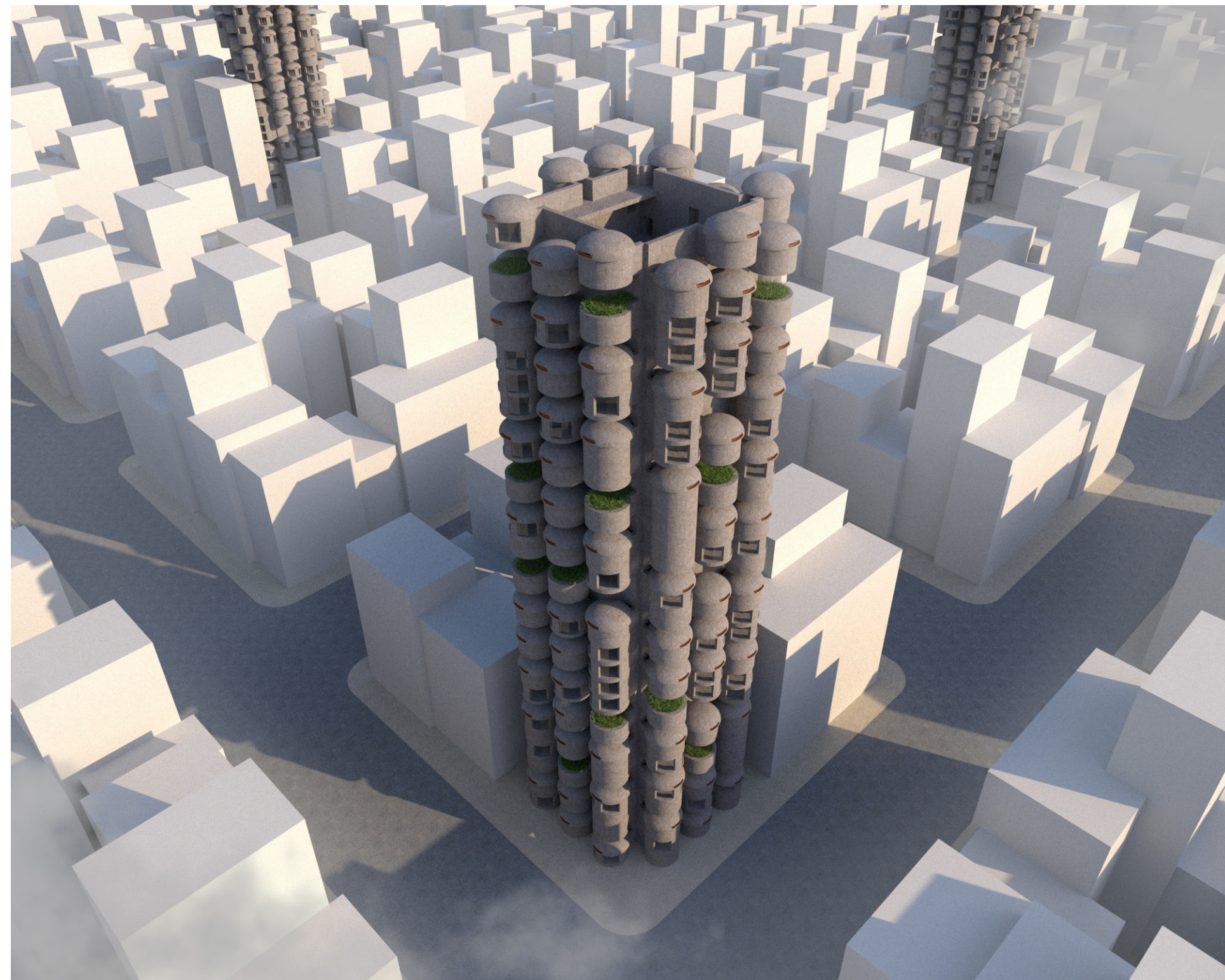
Shpresa enters through the gate of Hoxha's former home. A field which was always locked and guarded is now alive with children playing, a reminder to Shpresa of the generation of children scarred by the dictatorship and the separated couples like herself that were forced into a childless life.



06

The displaced, the persecuted.
Searching for asylum in their
native land. A communal effort,
an aggregation, providing housing
for its keepers - the survivors.

THE TOWERS.



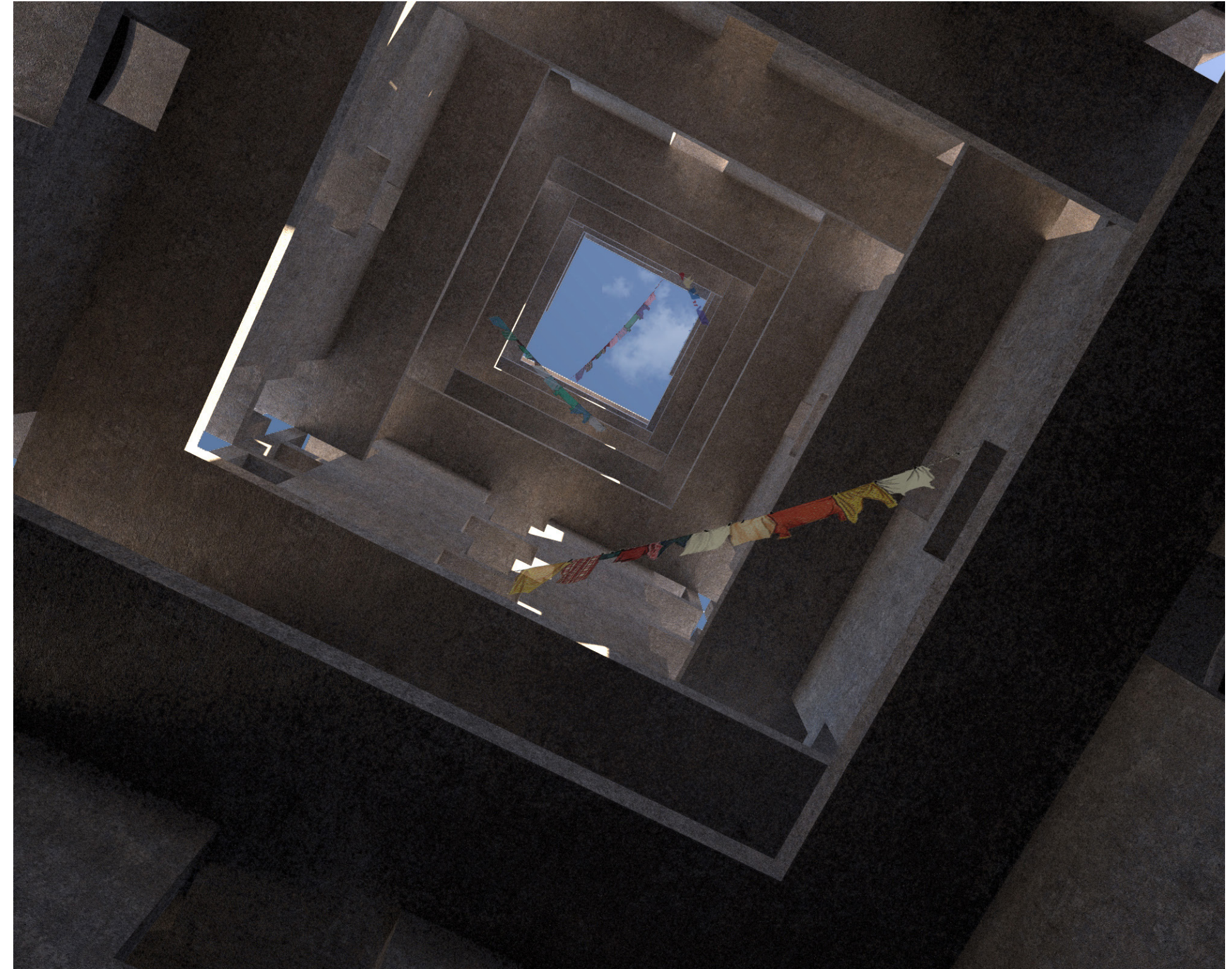
The Towers

The Towers

Constructed throughout the urban context, these towers provide shelter for the displaced victims of the dictatorship as they are granted apartments within the prefabricated clusters.

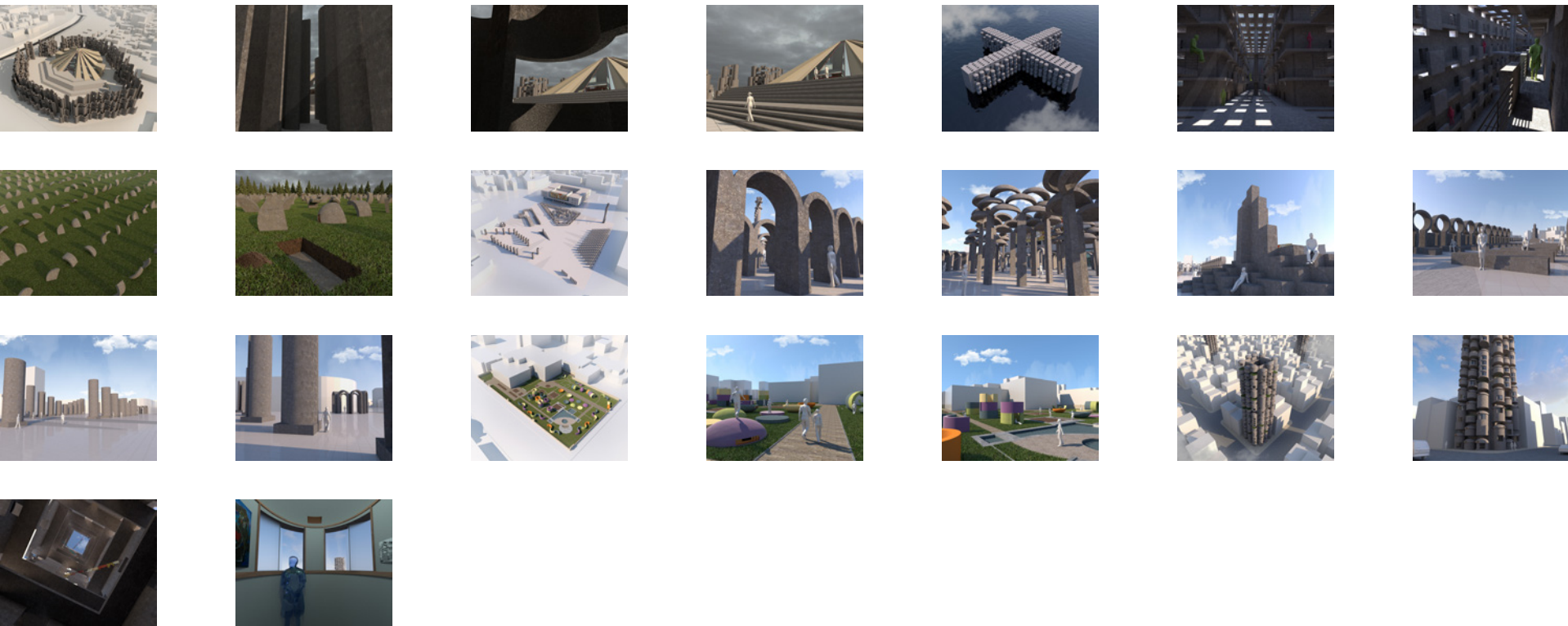


Shpresa returns to her apartment, unsuccessful in finding information on the location of her separated partner, I Burgosur.



In her empty studio, Shpresa sees him, but he's not there, only the fading memory of his image. Although Shpresa, like many Albanians, has survived the paranoia of the dictator and may have reclaimed his bunkers, residual trauma remains – trauma that only fades with each distanced generation.





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